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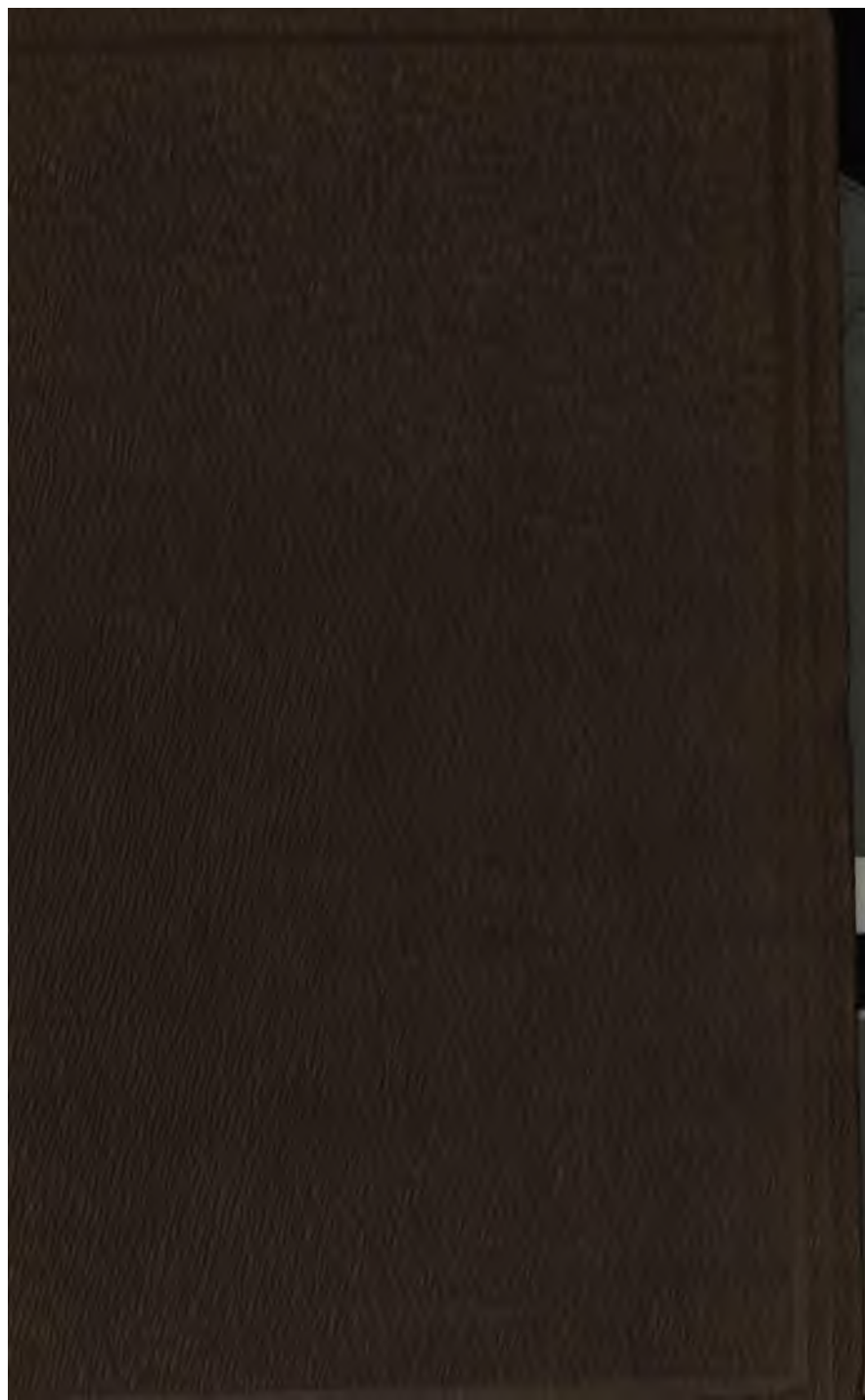
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ALMOST A HEROINE:

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"CHARLES AUCHESTER," "RUMOUR,"

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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ALMOST A HEROINE.

CHAPTER I.

UNFORBIDDEN FRUIT.

WE talked no more that night, we two—I should indeed think not.

Next morning he was gone when I came down: I half wondered whither, half guessed, for it was not later than usual.

Guessed wrong of course; else, at twelve o'clock, almost on the stroke, the parcel of books had surely not arrived as it did, fastened

together as I beheld the night before. I did not open it then, for I had no time to read—I wrote all day,—with such interruptions as were salutary, if inconvenient, till four o'clock, and then Philippa ran in, an hour too soon from school; in fact, her instructress had a sick headache, and had sent her prematurely home, fearing, or not able to bear, her noise.

There was no quiet in the house, for it was a lovely afternoon, and everything, with Philippa, was precedental; she required me to take her out, and I obeyed. Coming back as dusk was falling, there was no one there yet, save Hilary, who had resolutely refused to accompany us. Tea was over, Philippa enwrapped in hairdressing once more (the dummy never failed), and the boy in the other room, alone,—no Arnold Major. I was not alarmed, of course, only anxious everything should go straight, and, for the first

time and the last, I rifled his writing-desk for the sheets he had been upon latest. It was "Madras" night, and just as well I was there, for, I doubt not, had the proofs of the Oriental ephemera been wanting *once*, he would have lost his situation. I corrected and enclosed them, and, after they were fetched away, went on with the next number in manuscript, finished an article *ad libitum*, without an idea what it was about (I never heard my part of it called in question), and then commenced where the reader's mark was set in the middle of the second volume of a romance in *blue letter* hieroglyph, which I translated in a short written digest as easily as I could, that he might be sure I had read it, for when he particularly hated a book, he was always over-scrupulous to do it justice. Then I sent the imps to bed (Philippa much exhilarated by its being an hour later than their usual time), and having done all

I could to anticipate the following day for him, I sat and watched the fire, meditating, of course. Still wondering and wondering, for my first guess had passed into *supposition*, and now the supposition seemed incredible—it was surely not like him with his pride—the strictest, while the purest it was possible for pride to be—to rend its veil intact abruptly. How little I understood him!—how little could I appreciate the immeasurability of something in him that was not pride! There may be a *class* of persons with his *temperament*, but I question if there ever existed an individual character like his own. No wondrous certificate, perchance, to bestow on a mortal whose very humanity is Heaven's making ; but where variety is infinite, the finite cleaves to the finite first, perhaps.

Ten o'clock! I could bear it no longer. I took a book and stared at it, and wished

I knew how to make fishing-nets, or to build ships with straws (like the French prisoners in the last war except how many?), or to copy Jullien's studies in double crayon, whatever that may be, or to write little sets of verses in common metre, with only two rhymes,—the second line and the last: none of these accomplishments were mine: I was, though well educated, a very dullard at accomplishments, magnificent or trivial, and at last I took an egg-glass and turned it continually on the table before me, watching it,—never let ladies be accused of "spilling" time again—till just eleven.

At last he came, and then I hardly dared to face him. The cruel fancy seized me, that perhaps I had erred—had allowed my imagination to deceive me—had lured him, even him, to the gates of that grave whence there is no resurrection—despair.

Fantasies absurd and worthless as the

half-dreams that flit with waking, unremembered. Not so easily, if ever, can I forget his face, his aspect, his address. No angel now, nor any transfigured mortal clothed on with superhuman glory—but for the first time a man, a perfect man—his power and will made one; his love his life—both free.

I had not *looked*, before I knew—before he even grasped my hand; and with the knowledge, all surprise, all wonder vanished; whatever he had done seemed natural as its result.

For a few minutes he uttered not a word—nor I. In fact, had he not spoken at all, I should have been quite contented, because convinced; not that I was not curious, but I was not going to show it! First came this wayward observation—his pride, by *her* defeated, revenging itself on *me*:—

“It was all your fault, you know!”

"I am only too happy to bear the blame."

"Do you think me wicked? Selfish I am—I must be."

It would not do to spin out long answers, he was too excited and too glad to bear them.

"In what way *wicked*? I can better understand the selfishness."

"Those children — such a burden! I thought of them the whole time too; reckoned all the sum of their annoyances; yet it made *no difference*."

The exultant air, the tone of triumph, the regal brow so lately drooping, how strangely they made me feel! Our fraternity of sorrow dissolved for ever!

"No, I should think it made no difference with *her*—another difficulty would have struck me first, I own."

This was ill-timed of me, and ignorant—

to suggest that there *could* be a difficulty now the hill difficulty was melted into a wide and blooming valley—the only difficulty for him—the doubt of *her*.

He flushed and frowned—looked splendid, with his eyes dilated and deep-sparkling, but very angry, too—a ruffling gust one never sees disturb the ice-bound, as the *summer-sea*.

“Any difficulty *you* could suggest, might have been suggested *before*, I think,” he said—fancy *him* so irritated? “I wonder at you, Ernest?”

“I wonder at *myself* that you mistake me, for I must have been stupid indeed. Don’t you know how exquisitely glad I am? I only meant—no, I won’t say that—that were to bungle worse.”

“Do tell me—quick.”

His jealousy woke quickly too. I *dared* not refuse to tell him. How like a puny

half-enchanted changeling I felt beside his glorious manhood, sudden blossomed as the cereus at its midnight bridal, or the aloe of a hundred years.

"I was only thinking of her being rich, and you—"

"And I poor! Why on earth do you hesitate? Am I not poor just the same—in money?"

"You know what people generally say about poor men marrying rich women. I only thought—"

He laughed heartily. I had never seen him do such a thing. His tone was half amused and half-caressing—wholly and superbly *man-like*—very strong; he was like one whose bonds are broken, who *feels* his strength and glories in it. Was that grand mood to last? I thought not, even *then*.

"Ernest, you are a very child in some things; don't you know the very alphabet of

the law? You have suffered enough from its letter."

"I shall understand if you choose to explain, Mr. Major."

I think my voice *untuned* his perfect bliss—just for a moment—he was so benevolent; though I should have despised him sufficiently, could I have enticed him, for more than a moment, away from that long-earned joy, so largely paid with interest now.

"There is not the slightest necessity for me, or the two children, to benefit by Miss —— Her money," with such a smile, "every farthing, can be *forced* on her, and she can't force me, or them, to take one! She has always lived in comfort, and will still do so—do as she pleases in all respects. We are perfectly independent, she and I, of each other's affairs, or income, or expenditure; so shall remain; only we shall be one *in life*. I should

not yield an iota of my priceless rights, for she is mine, because she *gave* herself to me."

He stretched his arms and smiled again—as if the warm, delicious magnetism of touch had left the phantom of an embrace within them. I did not doubt it had.

"You mean you will have her money tied up to her ; but suppose she rebels?"

"*She* rebel! She knows her real power, and would disdain to essay a false position, even for an hour. There is not one woman in the world who is so difficult to convince, and who, when convinced, believes so heartily. She will know my will, and do it."

"Royal style! Well for her you are no tyrant. But still, if she chooses, she can make the children—"

"Ernest, do not provoke me ; it is unworthy of you. She can't make the children anything I don't choose."

"I was only going to say 'make' them presents."

"And provided she did not spend enough on their presents to inconvenience herself, or deprive herself of anything she desired, I should thank her more heartily than the children would for such tokens of her goodness, for I doubt their gratitude, but not my own."

He was incorruptible—worthy of her; not a false or worldly motive infected either. I thought how different I should have been myself. And yet, was I not penniless when I *once* loved?

"You don't ask me anything, Ernest. You don't want to hear. I can't tell you much; but I should like you to know—"

"Oh, tell me! how could I ever ask? Who cares, if not I? Who wants to hear?"

"I *don't* forget you, though I *seem* as if I forgot your kindness—it is because I am no

woman; I cannot express to you. Some day she shall thank you for me. I tell you she is grateful too, and she says there is not another man or woman in the world, young or old, wise or foolish, who would have drawn from her what you did. I know not your secret. She says it is your sympathy—I say, your passion.”

“It was only my power of loving, if that is sympathy and passion too. I thought it was sad you two should not be one. No decree of heaven parted you, and man’s (to me) are as tow in a red-hot furnace—that was all.”

“It seems impossible—that this morning—Well! Ernest, I was more miserable and self-disgusted this morning than ever, and I thought I would try to annihilate my own desires, by cutting off dead my hope. I had not the slightest idea, when I went into that room this afternoon, that I should *not* be

refused. I *wanted* her to refuse me, reject me, disdain me, rather than not see her again, for since *that night*, I have been starving for her, I think, rather, I was like those who die the thirst-death in the desert. I have never felt so inhuman in my life as this day. And yet my humanity never so far prevailed. But when I *saw* her, it was enough; her distant greeting, so alarmed, so cold; her pride that sprang up, and covered her all over as a woman-warrior, whose sex is mailed. I must have been a demon or a brute, if I had preserved my craven self-contempt before her. I thought of God and my own soul, that not only my *soul* he had created, but *me*, my body—that if he made me, and was all love Himself, surely it was my right, in so far as I knew myself pure of purpose, to speak my love as well as feel it.

“And I did—it all came out—before I

explained or prepared her the least. I could not have *apologised*; it would have been mean. And she—oh she!—I don't think she was *surprised*; how miserable I should have been to have *surprised* her! *then* she could not have been thinking of me."

Not surprised? Oh! woman, thou art the only *holy* hypocrite, for thy deceptions are ever born of love!

He had fallen into a delicious reverie—his eyes were feasting on the unseen; his lip looked as if yet tasting kisses. Only Horatia, of all women, could have suited Arnold Major, because none other would have behaved as a *wife* to him before espousal, in everything but marriage. I don't believe he would have borne the effete absurdities of a lingering courtship, regulated step by step.

Had he died after their first kiss (returned as freely as received), she would have been his widow in her own esteem, for life.

“She is brave; I don’t know that I *could* have sent such a message, in such a tone—that woman sent upstairs when I had been there half-an-hour about, to fetch her down to dinner. This was in the middle of—Oh, Ernest! If I had been *killed*, I could not have uttered a word. She went to the door and said (her very clearest):—

“‘Tell her to be so good as not to wait for me, for I cannot come. I am engaged with a friend on business.’

“Then she came back to me, and trembled like a leaf.

“I must tell you one thing—that, too, I know no other woman would have confessed. In her *own* voice, too, not the voice her acquaintance know for her’s, nor her admirers think so charming, but which speaks into one’s open heart. I never forget her own words, either. We had been talking a long, long time (how dreadfully famished she must have

been—how awfully selfish I was!) and had spoken of course about the celebrated proposals that were never made.

“One hears curious things, you are aware, about one’s self—things that might have happened, and things that never happened and never could; but now and then it is droll to hear the truth, and does one no harm, I fancy.”

Horatia’s exact trick—I knew it—and he actually had caught her accent. Were they not already—

“Distinct in individualities,
But like each other even as *those who love.*”

“I admired your brother very much, when I was a mere girl—he was very beautiful, and I own I was flattered by his little notices. I thought him a genius also, and I had the over-regard for genius which young persons are apt to entertain. But long before the

time you speak of, I had lost even admiration for his genius. I might have avoided the honour he had in contemplation to do me, but I was wicked enough to *wish* to refuse it. I knew he was not formed of stuff to hurt. In due proportion was my punishment—I never had the chance! Yes, Mrs. Le Kyteler had prepared me for it—he had spoken to her, and she to me—but I began to repent, long before he came, that I had allowed him to come. What I passed through is indescribable. He did not know she had spoken to me, but when he came in I thought I should sink into the floor. I knew I should not find the words I wanted—I didn't want them though!

“In a few minutes I got quite straight, and began to wonder when it would come. It was a strange thing to do, but he began to question me rather freely about certain opinions of mine which I never withhold,

but which he had not happened to hear me mention, because he was not a person I ever felt at home with, or sure of. On this occasion my good genius impelled me, and I talked *out* an immense time,—to me it seemed ages. Then suddenly he got up and went away!

“Mrs. Le Kyteler questioned me closely. I told her the simple fact; she absolutely would not believe it; to this day I fancy she does not. But she was truly very angry with me, and according to her views of the subject, I deserved it.

“It was droll; but something must have been said *somewhere*, for I was told I was positively engaged. Several persons would not believe I had not, as I tell you, had the chance.

“Then they said presently *what you know*, and I won’t repeat. It was useless for me to contradict *that* report, because I had con-

tradicted the *first* one without being believed.

“Yes, Ernest,”—I quite started at his relapse into himself—“she was too proud to say so, or at least, I cannot repeat her words just there, but I *do* believe that brother of mine pretended he was engaged to her; gained the credit, without the *trouble*, for a little time.”

“The trouble!” I exclaimed. It was dark to me, *that*.

“I forgot I have not told you all. I can’t *act* any more. I must be myself, or I shan’t come *to* at all! There was, of course, the usual—no—*twice* the usual amount of disagreeable gossip, and it had almost died out, when my darling’s godfather—”

How the sweet word thrilled from between his lips! He stopped a second, as if listening to it himself.

“He is a noble old man, her father’s

great friend, Sir Verveyne Waters: she was a wondrous pet of his, but *he* had been in India some years, only returned after Rangoon, hard wounded. Then he could not do enough for her. One day he went to see her—as he was always doing indeed—and asked her point-blank whether Valliance had proposed to her. (Now he hated Valliance's political pretences, I say not himself, and was known to have mainly contributed to the overthrow of some intention the Government had half assumed to send my brother to India.) She answered quite simply 'never,' and then he urged her a little, and being so dotingly fond of her, perhaps he had as much power to win her friendly confidence, at least as any *woman*. She told him exactly what had, and had *not* happened—her protectress's hints, all—in fact, not concealing her intention of refusing him.

“Sir Verveyne then explained his motives for enquiring—that he had heard it broached, and never believed her to have jilted Valliance. ‘Now, my dear child,’ he said (she told me), ‘I should have honoured you far more for jilting him than for marrying him, if you had ever promised. But I think it due to you to tell you, that I heard from his own lips *why* he never declared to you. I found it out myself. I bamboozled him a bit, flattered him over much, and wheedled monstrously.’”

“‘I will tell you,’ at last he exclaimed, with one of his dainty oaths. ‘I was fully prepared to do so—what an escape for me! I was treading on a perfect volcano, in a state of non-eruption! How could I have guessed it?—For a woman to sustain me in society, to rivet my friends and fascinate my foes; to take a high place on her own account as my wife, and keep it on my

own; and to preserve my male diners in excellent humour, and make my lady-guests less scarce; to bear me an heir or two, in case a single specimen should fail to flourish—why, she seemed perfect—the very pattern. For I could not have been bored with a beauty, to trail all the youths and bachelors at her flounce, as a magnet attracts steel-shavings; nor could I have endured a woman for my wife, who could not hold her own in conversation, and soar above the average in entertainment. Absolutely I was all but sold! I never imagined her with the remnant of a heart, save the calcinated ember *such* an education as hers is meant to reduce all such hysteric nonsense to. And I found—why, at first I thought she was acting—on the stage one might even have bravaed her, and thrown her a bouquet—but for a woman in her senses—a woman born for any social end, it was

terrible—tremendous! Her views and her ideas! why, they drag her to the very verge of vulgarism; and vulgar she ought to have been—not fashionable as she decidedly is. A wife with *feeling*! Give me, with such a bargain, a halter of the *ancien regime* round her throat, that at least I may sell her on the shortest notice.”

“The heart is better than the head sometimes, then, and I always thought so. But there must have been a tolerably clear head to foresee the need of the heart’s agency.”

I said this only to say *something*, for he stopped just so. Is not the exhaustion from ecstasy or enthusiasm greater and more sudden, if less subtle and intense, than that from sorrow or endurance? Surely, for he sank down all at once. He would not have confessed it, I suspect, but have talked all night in fits of forced re-animation, fed by too frequent draughts of intoxicating reminiscence.

I pretended, therefore, to be overtired myself.

"I am so desperately *done* with your recitals, that go to bed I *must*."

"Oh, don't let me detain you; how hateful of me! I wonder if I shall ever feel tired *any* more."

"Don't fear to feel sleepy at least, for now your conscience need not forbid your dreams."

He was no more a thorough-bred hero, than she was a perfect heroine. Fancy a hero marrying a woman with money when he himself has none! Perhaps something sweeter for this world, and better stuff for spirits and spiritual bodies in the next, was in them both. Was not Knowledge the forbidden, and Love the the unforbidden fruit?

CHAPTER II.

FLOWER TIME.

THEY say a marriage makes greater change in a family than death, and so it ought, but only those distraught beings, who dwell on the threshold of courtship's temple, know the consequent and emergent chaos created in a small respectable establishment whose head is "within the veil." I do not love taking upon myself, but was obliged during the next month or so. Certainly it was flattering

to be confided in (or would have been, but for the *reason* of the confidence). Arnold Major told me "he left everything to me;" and so he did, even to the keys, and I was a week learning up the locks they fitted. I have often heard the domestic menage of university dons lauded, but never believed in their economy, though readily in their regardlessness of expense; and I put to the test now the super-excellence of that excellent thing, a good housekeeper. I was not one—could not be—the week's bills were all a pound higher than the average of the maid's reckoning; though that was only the tenth part of "Mr. Glashier's" celebrated "forty-three years." She and I ever were in consultation, and could never tell how it happened. I am sure she didn't spend it; she couldn't, for I paid for everything as it came in, just like her master. How I marvelled he could do it, and yet keep his head clear; I could not:

and attempted not a single literary or scholastic experiment all that *long short* time.

I recollect, a very few days after the engagement so interesting to me, but which I had not thought it possible could be even *particularly* known as yet, Arnold Major came in for a few moments at six o'clock, instead of going straight to her, as was his wont, for nothing could tempt him until freed in the afternoon, I knew that. He had a letter in his hand, which he handed to me, a regular business formulary, written in the middle of a square blue sheet, stamped with the prepossessing "mark" of "Brown, Jones, and Co. I was horror-stricken at first, fearing he was dismissed from the situation he had gained so hardly and filled so well. It was a direct offer to *raise* his salary two hundred a-year more.

"Whatever is the reason?—anyhow it is a good thing—but why just now?"

"Because they have *heard*. That exalted gossip, Sir Verveyne Waters, deals with them, and indeed was the *means* of their Madras connection, which is immense; he could not hold his tongue, and this is the result."

"Is it possible! I never shall know worldly people to the bottom."

"Have dregs any bottom?"

"Of course you will accept it?"

"Of *course* refuse."

"Why, do you mean to say you don't earn it?"

"Possibly; but they would subtract the extra sum in dribblets from five or six of their other underlings. Did you fancy it would be a fresh scoop from the mine? I know them better. Will you answer it for me in my name, and say 'no' in my way—you know how?"

"Of course I will, and imitate your hand too."

This was the only time he came in till near eleven; and how angry he used to be with Mrs. Le Kyteler, because she *drove* him away at ten.

"She won't let us alone; she always sends word that she has gone into her room—and of course that is my signal. She used to be up all night at parties, and often *sits* awake for hours now. There is one debt of gratitude I owe her; she will enable me to ask Horatia for *herself* the sooner."

I know it is the fashion, in romance, to make courtship the Ultima Thule of romance—to pour out on it the full libation of authoresque *means*; to rarefy and sublimate the condition, as though marriage after it were tame and cold *awakening* from Paradise to platitude. False utterly, in essence and expression, this *misrepresentation*. A *progressive* state of any kind is decided on and receives its character from the end which crowns it; and

in such a sense, perhaps, this fashion of writing is correct (if not true), for their fictive marriages are as *unlike* true marriage, as their "romance" is unlike poetry. Courtship, exquisite as it must be, fraught with delicious emblems, and "breathing spring," is *merely* valuable and substantially a treasure of the being, in proportion to its fixed results. Therefore, to a looker-on, who is desperately interested and sincerely sympathetic, there is something painful in it, while so tender—the greater the chance of perfect happiness in union, the more the passionate suspense is over-wrought to fear.

I was not singular. I recollect *his* saying to me, one night, about a week after that glorious one he came home *changed*.

"Oh, Ernest! I *wish* we were married. I should not care how long I courted afterwards—but one of us might die! It is not ingratitude—but life is short any how, and

love makes it shorter; time at least. Nothing that happened *then* would matter; but now I cannot *bear* sometimes, yet *must*, to leave her. It is *unnatural*, when love is perfect."

I thought so, too. I had thought so often, when musing on that, the *only* subject eternally fresh, and from which springs Wisdom in an everlasting fountain, free to all—of which few taste—and those who taste drink deep, and drink for ever!

"My dear friend, why do you not strike a blow at conventionalism, which, it seems to me, a breath could break down, like a house of cards? You could marry *when* you chose."

"And never give her time enough to find out that—*truly*—she does not detest me."

Oh, jealous! did I not know it afore-time? Well for him he had found *her*!

"You *really* do mean to say that is your reason?"

"The only one. I torment myself awfully for fear she should find out she cannot personally *like*—not only *love* me!"

Poor, dear Horatia! I felt certain she was fretting on precisely the same point—reversed in her, of course—lest she too should fail to *please*. But women are the *only* proud ones after all! and the only *faithful*;—not more *constant* than we men, for I do think men and women divide the laurels *there*.

This end of conversation was one among many ends, most shorter. I had rather too much tact to plague him with "dowdy" details of my domestic non-success. And working so hard all the bright day-time (as romantic to *true* lovers as twilight, star, or moonshine) he did deserve his evenings — besides there is a "time to love" — and were love made the chief business of life,

all *living* truths would flourish better, whatever might become of

“Gold and Clay.”

This, by-the-bye. It was (I suppose as is usually the case) the doom and glory of the servant to enlighten the children — for I never told them, not exactly knowing how to do it, and dreading Philippa’s delight as much as Hilary’s displeasure, of the latter feeling sure beforehand. About the end of the first week, the boy came sauntering in, with that listless elegance very peculiar to men of letters, men of universal modern literary dilettantism (not *learned* men) — and which sat upon this child as upon a man. Generally, I took no notice of him when he entered so, a very uncommon thing in the forenoon, when he was wont to be *chained* to his books — and when he only came, if he wanted a word in a dictionary or lexicon ampler

than his own. To my amaze, he stood still at the table, leaning his angular little elbow on it. I was trying to unconglomerate a nucleus of items in a grocer's bill, which were inconceivable to realise, because the children had had neither tart nor pudding, only boiled rice the whole week, after their daily dinner.

There must, I suppose, be a *dawn* of the magnetic gift, either affective or receptive, but the wondrous quality in Arnold Major's gaze that had so often fixed and made me quiver, a look he had no idea of possessing or *using* (he made the very least of all his own charms always), that quality had been inherited in very diminished quantity by his brother's *eldest* son.

I was writing figures, as I have said, and quite without intention was drawn to look at him.

I noted the bright, steadfast point, the

speck of attraction in the pupil of each eye —next instant it had passed—flitted like lightning. A heavy dimness overspread the poor babe's vision — he half reeled to my side—and, oh, strange fact, passed his little arm about my neck, and bowed his head upon my shoulder. His tears, few and big as the sultry heat drops that never refresh the earth, fell into my very bosom. I had never seen this child cry a child's tears, so wild and so wetting to the full, any more than I had seen him laugh the laugh of childhood. But I knew better than to inquire. I waited rather.

He did not sob, his temperament was too reluctant, too reserved. Soon he was tearless as the drought.

"I want to go and live with you. I won't live with *them*," he said.

Can it be believed that my own *false* position in the future home of Arnold Major

had never struck me? I take no credit to myself; no innocent expletive will serve to mask my folly! I believe I was at once too unconventional (O curse in this strait Britain, over-peopled and over-worked!) to reflect on my own future at all. How thankful was I to the child! For, though *integrally* as poor as a *gentleman* could be, I made enough to be able to pay for two rooms, and keep them clean besides.

Selfish as those wrapped in comfort and in custom (the highest luxuries of the ideal, whose minds can only *act* perfectly in a physical calm)—selfish I had truly been. But now I saw, perceived, and felt.

“Don’t you like your uncle to be so happy, Hilary?”

“As he pleases. I don’t care about *that*, but I don’t choose to live with a woman, since mamma was laid out; and I won’t. If you will take me to live with you, I will work hard. I

will copy all your books, and clean the grate, and go out and beg—anything! Not that I particularly like you, but you don't look happy, and I *hate* happiness."

I thought a moment.

"Then, my dear child, if your uncle *allows* you to leave him and live with me, you certainly shall. I am very poor—you don't know *that*."

"Oh, yes I do; but you are far cleverer than he, and can teach me, if you will."

Not a particularly *available* cleverness, thought I.

"As for his *allowing* me, how can he do that? He has no power over me—no one has—in law."

"What can you know of law?"

"The woman told me, and mamma too. It was only because *she* told me she desired me to come home with *him* here, that I came; she would have liked you better, if she had seen you."

Then he relapsed back, impracticable as are Druid remains.

It was detestable to intrude my own affairs on Arnold Major; but I knew the breach would have to be made some time, and the present was the best. That very night, when he returned, I exclaimed, athwart the sweet, warm dream which flushed his very face yet, from his fancy:—

“I can’t *bear* to bore you at this moment, and I believe you know it; but one thing I *must* say, rather ask. You have often trusted the boy to me; will you do so entirely for the future, making whatever arrangements you please, of course?”

“What *do* you mean?”

The dream was troubled with his *real* surprise.

“Only that he asked me to-day whether he might live with me when I leave you.”

A perfect storm of expressions swept over his

face—perplexity, distress, annoyance, generosity.

“How unutterably clumsy I am ! How ungrateful I must *seem* ! Forgive me, if I don’t explain to you to-night—only do *not* speak of *going*.”

And (perhaps to prevent it effectually) he went himself; and came downstairs no more that night.

Next morning there was a little note, very short, and I did not expect to hear its contents. Howbeit, after breakfast, he said to me, just as the children had vanished :—

“She wishes for Philippa to spend the day there; in fact, she wanted me to promise last night, and I persisted in refusing, knowing the trouble it would entail. Now I *dare* not—the command is peremptory.”

“Will you tell the child?”

“I really cannot.”

I could quite understand that he *could not*.

I am sure I could not have named "my love" to Philippa. As soon as her uncle was out of the house, I informed her she was to go, to be fetched at eleven; and at eleven she *was* fetched, to her wildest glorification, in the brougham. Thus *early* had she been glorified, because she was to be returned at *four*. I wondered, till I saw her back again, where she would be disposed of by her hostess in the evening, and her good humour was sustained by the memories of a visit to the Zoological Gardens and a real ice in a confectioner's. Also the possession of a pack of playing-cards, with a deficit of five, a stuffed humming-bird without a glass, a pocket-book of 1830, with a quantity of silkworms'-silk in skeins between its leaves, a nutmeg in its native mace-sheath; and last and best, some easy knitting, begun with large pins and very bright scarlet wool. Only a woman would have devised this blessed expedient for keeping such child out of mis-

chief; and for the next week she was "seen and not heard," so intensely was she occupied in making, as she expressed it, soldiers' garters.

The very day after *her* visit, behold, *I* was sent for. Never had I been more astonished, for what could Miss Standish want with me? I said so to *him*, for he gave me the message late at night; no more little notes for me.

"I suppose you will allow it to be a gratification to see one's friends at all times," was his answer; if you do not intend to go, why, it is for you to say so, not for *me*."

"I should like to go; I have been dying of curiosity, as women say, to see her ever since—still I cannot fancy—"

"As curious as a woman too. I think," he said with a wise smile—a smile that breathed admiring pride.

"Do go, if only to gratify *me*." Sufficiently gratified he looked already.

"What time?"

"About five. I shall come an hour later *on purpose*."

"Dear! what ceremony! (I wonder if you *will*). How can it take an hour?"

"It may, if you are obstinate—take more—one word, Ernest—you do not know how sensitive she is. Pray do not hurt her; I could not *bear* it."

"Good powers! how *could* I hurt her? *I!*"

Not a word more could I elicit, and these few words made me very nervous I confess.

At five I went, next afternoon, not less nervous. I was more so than ever, and my heart throbbed with suspense. The servant who opened the door looked so disappointed at me. I liked this—it showed

that her kindness to her dependants had won its just reward, so seldom given, because so rarely earned. The man was disappointed that I was not his mistress's "sweet-heart;"—sweet word, that ever it should grow *wild*, and be used at random!—vulgar it can never be.

Horatia was alone in the drawing-room; one glance at her attitude (few figures have such extraordinary expressiveness as hers), before I saw her face, restored my proper equilibrium. She was thrice as nervous as myself; I went up to her, and bowing, said:

"It is very kind of you to allow me the great pleasure of seeing you—of congratulating you, Miss Standish—you will understand me. I do truly understand him and his happy fortune; he is *almost* worthy of it, if one man may say so of another."

I had better have held my tongue—I hardly “understood” *her*. She scarcely touched my hand—but just gestured towards the sofa. I took a chair near it—then she sat down, still turning her eyes from me, but I could see her face in full.

The most beautiful and original of all Lady Eastlake’s similitudes struck me then and there as true to nature. She speaks of the mysterious, almost bewildering fascination of the “orchidaceous countenance;” rare in humanity as its type in flower-life. Horatia’s face had this strange charm; expressions *rived* one’s sense in *her*, that would have merely, in instances of prettyism, touched the eye and vanished as unseen. So, bathed in the soft glory of intense yet unperfected happiness—the morning twilight, as rosy-dusk as the evening’s is purple-grey—she struck me in a new and touch-

ing fashion. What blessing that he not only passionately longed for, but immeasurably loved her; mere passion would have drifted her from a rock of loneliness to a whirlpool in which she would have been whelmed like a weed, and *yet* a heart brimful of calm affection, such as Saxon women are wont to crave as love—would have totally failed to bind her, or to bless,—nay, it might have stirred up a spirit in her which no man could have held in check; from which rather he would have been glad to fly.

These thoughts, mere fancies after all, passed swifter than “a summer cloud.” Meantime, it certainly was three or four minutes before she deigned, or was able, to speak.

She wore black silk; nothing became her so well, I know not why, for a less nun-like or sad-like person I never saw. It pointed her characteristicalness, however, like a very deep

“tone-bath” a fine photograph. Two ends of amber-ribbon in her hair behind, her only bit of colour, except that she had a little ring, simple and inexpensive as possible, a narrow flat gold one, on a certain finger. She had been fond of sporting a great many rings—she was a very Jewess in her taste for jewelry—and they became her; now she had put them by; and I think her singularly graceful hands looked gracefuller without them.

I was idiot enough to dream of carpet-knighthood, and began to speak of sundry circumstances, stale, second-hand as strawberries two days old. The *season* (much I knew about it), operas (what would I not have given to know *out* of the “Athenæum’s” critiques), plays at the dear “Princess’s” which, known to me by heart from childhood, were Paradise after the gates were shut to my experience. She took her very easiest tone, and coldest too, in answering all my

observations, and I was growing frightened rather than once more nervous, when she exclaimed:—

“Mr. Loftus, I should not have taken up your time for nothing, believe me. I have something to say, and fear to annoy your pride. —I don’t say *hurt* it, because you know I think it *does* want pruning very much, and only you *yourself* can doctor it aright. We are all more or less dependent on those we love; and no difference of opinion among us can destroy that *fact*. Do not be vexed if I say that I think you, and one who is more dear to me than you can either of you imagine” (what an inclusion!) “are not the very best companions for each other, without another, or third person, wholly devoid of your super-social idealities, to mediate between you (not keep the peace), but to preserve your bodies from being starved or rarefied into *uselessness*.”

What a tirade! I knew it was but the in-

roduction to some benevolent design of hers which she was ashamed to announce off-hand.

"I thank you, Miss Standish, for coupling my name with his at any rate, it is an honour I always strive my utmost to deserve."

This speech pleased her; I saw her face kindle.

"I dare say you have been pretty comfortable together, you two," with her *rather* saucy smile, not looking at me.

"I have been something a little better than *comfortable*, Miss Standish, but as for him, I don't think he ever was comfortable in his life."

"For the rest of it, I hope he will be."

Quite simply, but very tenderly! Suddenly she flung her hands together and interlaced the fingers, turned desperate, took her haughtiest tone, which, strange to say, was often the *kindest* possible.

"You see, he repeated some nonsense to me

yesterday of which I should have believed you *incapable*. Once for all, if you refuse to share our house—I don't say our home, for you shall be as solitary and independent as you think proper—why, it will make a very serious difference to us, for I will not marry if I deprive you of such a friend."

Oh, Horatia, it was well for you you were not put to the test! As a peroration, it was, however, very charming.

"What do you mean, Miss Standish? Do you suppose a man like Arnold Major would *endure* a third person between or near him and his; forgive me, but I was startled. There is no difference—will be no loss to me, except of his society, and *that* I must, I suppose, give up if he marries! I should rather think so."

"No, no; you don't understand. I told you stupidly. I mean that you should do exactly as you have hitherto done with respect to him as a *friend*. I am *quite*

aware that you have made your own arrangements mutually, of which I know and *shall* know nothing. It will be always the same; as hitherto, this will be *his house*, and everything in it in subjection to him; he cannot avoid *that*, the law of nature. You will speak to him—only promise me—please promise me?”

“What, Miss Standish?”

“That you will not thwart him—tease him—about it; he has been worried and tormented till—”

“I understand; you wish *me* not to thwart or tease him, and you know I have already given him ‘a turn’ at both. Is it not so?”

She laughed like a fair gipsy.

“He was very anxious—he is much attached to you.”

“But you see, Miss Standish, though I might trust you, and, indeed, feel no wound

to my pride, if you felt my presence under the same roof no plague, there is the boy; he has himself declared to me he would not live with anyone but me."

"I am not vain," she smiled, "but I fancy I myself could obviate that difficulty. I have a knack with children, particularly odd ones. Otherwise you might make him understand (if you were so kind) that he need not, to all intents and purposes, live with anyone but you. I will arrange so that you shall be as *if* you were in the next house; there is a certain wall—"

A thought struck me.

"Miss Standish—pardon the question—it *may* save some worry. Did the boy know your name when you used to visit his mother?"

"No; I didn't mention it, I think (there was no need); a dear, good woman (she had *nursed* our friend Mr. Major) told me

all the sorrows of the other poor dear; and so I went—not much good, I fear.”

Half blushing, as if angry or ashamed.

“The child saw you?”

“Yes, the boy; he was always there—never would leave her. I never saw the girl till lately, because, as you may imagine, she made too much noise for a sick room, and her uncle had sent her away—this very foster-nurse of his had charge of the wild thing.”

“It will do—I am so glad—there won’t be any trouble,” I murmured, half to myself.

She looked inquiring.

“I do hope *not*. You really have had (and taken) so much trouble for me—I mean, for *us*.”

No hesitation in the award—as *earnest* as the tone was light. I don’t know whether she *would* have said more—scarcely, I think

—but there was an interruption. She rose and took a few fleet steps towards the door—his knock!—had she not known it? —and certainly he had not come “an hour later on purpose;” it was barely twenty minutes.

I was annihilated forthwith, or as good. I might have been thin air for all the effect remaining in my presence. I saw them fly into each other’s arms : it was enough—no power could *part* them now.

I tried my experiment on Hilary that very night, and with marvellous success. I asked him (in the dusk) whether he recollected a lady who went to see his mamma when she was ill.

“There was only *one lady* came,” said he. “The rest were vulgar women,” briefly.

After a second or two, I said again:—

“What was she like?”

“I don’t remember her face, but she had

nice eyes, that looked soft and sorry. She had a white bonnet and a red shawl; she wanted to kiss me, and I wouldn't till she kissed mamma. She stroked mamma's hair, and said it was so pretty, and asked her for a bit of it, and cut it off; and next time she came—" (half choked this, but no *sob*), "she brought a gold locket with *that* hair, and gave it to me for myself; it had a black ribbon. I used to wear it till I came here, and then I *buried* it," with a gulp, "buried it in the cemetery, because I wouldn't let him see it, for fear *he* should touch it or take it away.

"I liked her: she had a sweet smell from herself, and she washed mamma's forehead with eau de cologne and something cold, and she sent her strawberries, and flowers, and *wine*—beautiful wine, and a great big pillow, and little books, with large prints and pictures: she never talked any nonsense, and she always made

mamma laugh a *little*. She told mamma she was as good as herself. I heard her.

“One day uncle came in, and, after that, she never came any more. But she sent flowers and things still.”

“Hilary, that very lady is Miss Standish. What do you think now?”

“Miss Standish! and she is going to marry *him*. Well, I will go if it is only to plague *him*, for I know he wants me dead.”

Oh, perversion of love and sweetness into bitterness and hatred, through the nonfulfilment of love's first law! I could no more scold the child than I could blame. All that could be done for him must be in the training of the future, slow as a sapling springs into a tree.

He could not get over the mystery of this marriage, however; and it remained a puzzle to him long and long. That any one should love his uncle he could not actually believe.

How I wondered what Miss Standish would

do with—rather how she would ever manage Mrs. Le Kyteler. I did not ask Arnold Major about it, for the simple reason that I had neither the time nor the chance : as after the interview, of which he forewarned me, with her, I did not see *her* again, and him only in such flying glimpses, as precluded any but the shortest greeting on both our parts, the children being present at breakfast, or, at least, one of them, always ; and both when Miss Standish did not send for Philippa to “breakfasts” with her, which happened about twice a-week, and which matutinal event struck thrice the awe and gratification into the imp’s breast that the most elaborate dinners and expensive suppers would have done. She always came back from them in time for school at ten, and chattered the whole evening of their ravishing enjoyments to me. This notice, by the way, is merely inserted to show Horatia’s *kind* of delicacy,—it was the only meal she was alone at. Mrs. Le Kyteler

always breakfasted in bed. And while touching the above point, let me add, that those who accused Miss Standish of humouring Mrs. Le Kyteler's whims, and enduring her constant supervision, for the sake of that fortune of hers, which she had no heirs of body, or of legal nearness, to inherit, were strangely at fault in the event. Mrs. Le Kyteler, a hot-headed, haughty, untender, but passionate woman, could have scarcely been expected to die very old; her life burned out too fast. And before three years had passed, she died, leaving to Mrs. Arnold Major—nothing save her dying acknowledgment (a loving one too,) of Horatia's long forbearance, sweet temper, tried and tormented for years, but neither soured nor made bitter, her generous concealment of every folly or weakness in her so-called protectress, and her real unworldliness in regard of that very vanished fortune. For, at that truthful time—the last hour before repose—it came out that on

Horatia's marriage, she had persuaded—*forced* Mrs. Le Kyteler to purchase an annuity with the whole of her remaining capital, diminished from its primal value very much through ill-management, unequal expenditure, extravagance —“extravagant generosities to myself,” Horatia always called them—and the bursting of a financial scheme or two, in which portions of it had been invested. So one end was gained—the world deemed Mrs. Le Kyteler richer than she was, because she removed, on her charge's marriage, into an establishment fully equal—in means and style, to that she quitted—and another end, to another person—Gain—was lost.

Howbeit (with full knowledge of Horatia's undying objection to the phrase, if not the frame, *ideal*, and her persistent protestations against heroicism in every ideal form), I will confess that I am quite sure she would not have had the phantom of an objection to receive a large worldly portion

by legacy from any one who could have afforded to leave her such, without denuding themselves of comforts in life, or depriving others of the least item of their rights afterwards.

This by the way. No one besides her husband and myself ever knew whether Mrs. Le Kyteler left her anything or not, at the time; for, fashionable as she certainly was always, her style's scutcheon had one flaw which could be got over no better than a *bar-sinister*; she had no gift of gossip, high or low! and if she occasionally dealt out of her deep nature too earnestly and passionately with trifles, never, never could she be accused of "trifling with serious matters."

Shall I ever forget that wedding-day? Scarcely—when it never faded, but reminds me of its soft spring morning every hour I see their perfect life.

Certainly, in books and out of them, people make marriage end when it begins! Little wonder, when one considers what they have to hide, and what assume.

If Miss Standish had been going to be married from Mr. Major's house (not the usual precedent), that domicile could scarce have been in greater confusion. No one did anything for days, except that the maid dusted double—she was a good dust-hater—in revenge for the universal strew. Of course Philippa played at enough weddings to provide the parish with “marital appendages” (a phrase Horatian). She was so beheaded (a phrase of our servant's, who of course meant the child had “lost her head”) with her own coming appropriate bridal costume, simple as it was, that she turned white writing-paper into every possible fragment of mimicry that bore upon the subject. I made her about a hundred favours, and fringed

out a dozen feathers, all from the best "cream laid letter," of which she ravaged her uncle's desk, having broken the lock first. Also, I had to provide endless square dishes (she was disgusted because I could not contrive round ones) for bits of bread, coffee-beans, pounded sugar, uncooked currants, rice, arrow-root (in powder), which had been begged from the kitchen for the "break-fast." This mania in miniature lasted till her clothes came home, the very night before *the day*.

Had I been born a woman, a nurse, a governess, a mother, or an old maid, I could not have been more deeply concerned in that costume and its results. Her uncle, whether proud of her or not, was too proud of some one else, not to have the elf bridesmaid — the only one, that was a stipulation of the bride's — in perfect order. Philippa would have looked as out of keeping

in silk, as a wood-nymph in *moire-antique*. He had given her a Dacca muslin frock and trousers, with just a beading of fine work to border both; a white china crape sash—the frock made high and basqued, with long sleeves, required neither scarf nor mantle; the sash very broad, and tied behind in fluted folds; a little white plush hat, the prevailing (then the new) mode, with a very thick full wreath of white narcissus twisted round it; also, for a bouquet, she was to carry a great bunch of fresh narcissus in her hand. This once—not for his own sake—had Arnold Major given his peculiar, if very fine, taste its way. The maid, as proud, if not as vain, as Philippa, arrayed her in full rehearsal, and then called me to look at her. Her uncle had certainly made of her a picture, if nothing better. Sir Thomas Lawrence might have come out of his grave to paint her—even without the living flowers

that were ordered from the country for the next morning—as “Early May.” I didn’t mean to show her I admired her, but the minx saw it in my face, and instantly a wave of the old mischief submerged even her vanity. She plucked the soft creamy-looking hat from her head, danced on a chair, and stuck it on the top of mine, ruthlessly crushing the delicate narcissus (made at Michell’s, in Oxford Street) in her two little rude brown hands. Then she leaped off the chair, twisted the broad soft waist cincture till she got the tie in front, and of that she made a conglomerate knot. The maid (she and I were in league for the hour, by the force of circumstances) asked me to hold her still while she “undid” the knot, and half succeeded only. For the instant the sash was loose, Philippa was off—had flown downstairs; and the emergency engrossed the entire attention of the maid and myself—dually

responsible for her appearance at church next day. For well I knew, neither I nor any other should commune that night with Arnold Major face to face.

In default of the orthodox bridesmaidhood, I must prose on this, my woe and final triumph. Had not the bridegroom relied on me to present her perfectly *in statu quo*? For I was to give Philippa my arm, at all events. Certainly she was not more than two feet my "shorter,"—but oh, the wriggles of her inconstant temperament, who could so well have appreciated their possible results as I, subject to her these last dying hours of her uncle's "single life, half death?"

I was as awkward as an unaccustomed male creature who is neither a French stay-maker nor English purveyor of riding-habits—endeavouring to help the servant—for she positively cried, wiping her eyes by stealth with her knuckles, at the disorganisation of the perfect

little effect—the hat with its soft nap “brushed the wrong way,” the scrunched flowers, the undue limpness of the china crape delivered from its own bonds.

She was doing, and I watching for several minutes. Then, when she had positively retrieved all injury, we both thought of Philippa, and the frock she still carried on her person.

Everyone will be exhausted of her, as I was that time. But there were in fact certain premises on the top of the house, and to it pertaining, commonly called “leads.” Arnold Major, with his half morbid terror of injury to the children, had forbidden them that domain, and the region that led to and communicated with it, a space about three feet and a-half high, with cobwebs and a low set of steps to furnish it. To make a dull story short, there existed in the heart of Philippa a yearning for the leads because for-

bidden. So when the maid and I, after screaming all over the house for her, finally explored, we discovered that she had broken the neck of a bottle of Bass in the cellar, drunk half its contents, and was then dancing on the leads in a state of semi-intoxication. The unfortunate frock was dyed with the deposit of smuts and dust up there, and the maid sat up till five in the morning, washing, clear-starching, and "springing."

The daylight settled her a little, and if she had been going to her own coronation, she could not have given herself grander airs. She wanted to be dressed before breakfast, and I only quieted her by strict injunctions how she was to behave in church. I did not see him, nor desire to do so then. But lo! at the eleventh hour, the boy came to me, entreating, supplicating, that he might not be made to go. I had hardly been prepared for this—I tried to

reason, and then his nature broke out bleeding in its mother wound.

“I won’t go!” said he violently, “I will go to no marriages—my mamma was not married. You cannot make me.”

And he rushed into the garden and banged the door. I did not follow—under the circumstances I resolved to obey my impulse, and leave him at home. If Arnold Major or his wife should scold me afterwards, it would be too late to matter, and I did not greatly believe that either of them would miss him.

They did not. There is little poetry in most marriages, and in every-day weddings even sentiment is vulgarised by precedent. In this instance (to me, the rest did not perceive it, I am sure), there was poetry in the very ceremony, circumstances, and custom. Horatia, in an innocent over-anxiety to do him more than honour, had invited, I cannot say how many of her “highest” and most influential friends.

Such an array of fine people, finely clothed, I never met; it was a mob of exquisitely dressed ladies and got-up men; round the railings, it was as though

“A wind-waved tulip-bed,”

framed, quivering, rustling, and blazing-tinted —two shadow-statues in the midst, so pale and quiet stood they both, so utterly absorbed. As for feeling the crowd, the stares and smiles, the silkly-burnished atmosphere closed round them; it was no more to them either than the world is to the dying: yet were they held in thrall by the fact of *not* being alone, and magnetised through great suspense.

I had to make various grimaces at my charge to induce her to bear being entirely overlooked by the bride, who was quite past presenting her handkerchief, bouquet, and gloves to her attendant! In truth (just like herself) Horatia carried nothing in her hand

except her gloves, which she had pulled off quietly, rather wearily, the moment she had taken her place. She was most perfectly dressed, however, with dead white silk, thick, soft as fresh fallen snow; a shawl, drooping to her very feet, of Lisle lace, the smallest centre pattern and the richest border (neither Honiton nor Brussels,) and a bonnet of the same lace, small but hood-formed, with a fall; no flowers, nor artificial "love-herbs," no ornaments, no "fuss."

About half through the short service I "was ware" (and made ware by so many of the idlers near me looking up to the gallery one side) of a gentleman leaning along the red front-cushion with his elbows, and sneering down on the two lovers like a Mayfair Mephistopheles. The likeness, angelic diabolical, to Arnold Major; the hair such as the latter had described it—nay, the very unveiled surprise of the wedding-guests

confirmed my first flash of a suspicion. What a mercy the child Hilary was not there ! As for Philippa, she was far too self-engrossed to notice—or if she noticed, to know — her father.

And there were many joined the festivity that day, and had enjoyed Horatia's wit and hospitality often and again, besides, who declared her unwomanly, unnatural, unfeeling, because one child was present whose father did not own it ; whose father had not been invited ! Let that pass ; Horatia could afford to be stuff for scandal now and then, she was rich in all humanities, so large in heart, if so exclusive in love and liking.

The banquet was perfect—not the least superb, but everything on the table was eatable and drinkable—the rarest facts in wedding-breakfasts and ball-suppers now. There was nothing to do but eat and drink for the guests, as the bride and bridegroom went straight

away from the church-door together to a country corner, the brightest within ten miles of town ; I have often seen it since, and so have they. By three o'clock the house in Wilton Crescent was deserted as Gerstäcker's "dream-house" again : every guest gone ; even Mrs. Le Kyteler, who would not take off her bonnet in it ! (noble exemplar of personal pride) but had her carriage waiting at the door, and whirled off to one of the sweet little slips of lesser houses in Upper Brook Street, where (I had it on unquestionable authority—her own maid's through our servants) she cried the rest of the day, went into hysterics at evening, and never went to bed all night.

CHAPTER III.

SUMMER CLOUDS.

I SHOULD not have drawn even a vignette of the wedding, but for the fact of its being the initial to certain after-scenes and facts. I had a kind, noble-worded note—quite as dashing as heretofore, and not a whit the warmer than the old ones, from *her*, and about five lines of his across it, to beseech “me to do them the infinite kindness to spare them the cold vision of an empty house.” Arnold Major’s house

could not be given up till June, and here June was ; so the note was to spare me any trouble or blushes about being “turned out” on the quarter day. And they made eight weeks of their honeymoon abroad,—at home the bees never wearied of working, because the summer weather always lasted !

But the “at home” for three days after their return was a failure—the only social lapse Horatia ever made. Such quantities of people came ; five—six times as many as had decked the altar ; such droll people too, as well as fine, languid, condescending, and flattered ones. Came for ten minutes—sat staring, or not seeing anything (according to their degrees of breeding), said a few different words on the same subjects—and went. I have no doubt each and all went away highly (or lowly) offended with the late Miss Standish, because she could not or would not amuse them, more than ever. But Horatia could

not get rid of her husband, and her self-containedness (never an extensive capital of hers) had passed quite into him. Not that she blushed, changed colour, or did anything she ought not to have done; on the contrary she had never looked so interesting or been more polite; there was however no warmth about her for anyone, except *her own*, just yet, it had all retreated to the central life-heat, for the present, where the faculties and the feelings met and rushed into embrace as one. Not yet assimilated to the summer passion she had blossomed fresh to, it could not yet freely penetrate her character—how then inform her manner? It is not that such a woman alters with marriage; but with the fulfilment of the Creator's whole designs in her, she expands—is unimprisoned through the love that, under every form and image, is alone the agent of everlasting Freedom.

And the *other*! Men do not pass into

such perfection as their wives by marriage, their own physical development, if not their moral beauty, being complete before. I have no doubt Horatia felt a difference between her acquaintance-friend and lover-husband—but it sprang from the change in herself, not him. I saw him exactly the same, he could not have more dearly doted on her now, than he had done before, but by curious chance I knew this far better than she could know. And as for his extraordinary lovingness, it was only now active instead of passive, just as his passion was revealed instead of hid.

And therefore now, just as I had always perceived it, the bitterness in him, to which I have once alluded, was as perceptible. His sweet disposition always tempered it to her, and his exceeding grandeur of character, through its out-flowing humanity, absorbed it—as the air a perfume—still in gusts I felt

it, and dreaded it not for her sake, but his. You could not call his innate displeasure in society a prejudice, any more than you could damn his jealousy as a bad principle—yet both were in him and part of him. He disliked society in proportion to his charity towards all the world, and it having never yielded him either homage or appreciation, perhaps it was not strange he should. Then his temperament extremely ardent; an over-active brain; with nerves of electrical receptivity; the delicate melancholy of his views and opinions that, not tintured with rainbow imagination, dwelt ever on sin and shame with sorrow that knew not hatred—above all the engrossing, if fastidious, passionateness that pervaded him perhaps accounted for his antipathies, which, if they were odd, were innocent. I just touch on them in recalling his behaviour those three “at homes.” Had Horatia asked him to go up in a bal-

loon for two hours under a broiling sun, he would have done it without question or hesitation, feeding in anticipation on a thousand kisses when he should come down. And therefore he so sedulously followed her arrangements, premeditated with scarce a thought on her part, only as a matter of course. He was excessively courteous to everyone, his equanimity was unperturbed, no higher gentleman, if none simpler, came or went. But I who knew his soul, as one who, in all other respects unlike him, had a single point in common, can know, was perfectly aware of his impatient longings to "have done with it," as the phrase is, and be alone with her; of his jealousy untouched with meanness, that grudged the very sight of her to those her passing guests. And oh, how tired she looked when all had gone! though I don't suppose it would have entered her head to say so, she was too completely

inured to etiquette to complain of, or even comprehend, its results.

One favour on his part (actually asked by him as a favour) but received and obeyed as law, was the request that in those three grand, gloomy afternoons, Philippa should be kept out of the way. So I found her, happier than is describable, at six o'clock, with the aquarium. I took her to dine with Hilary and myself in my own room—the domestic chaos was not yet perfectly reduced to order. But next day, though, in respect of the boy, she left me perfectly independent, and as if, indeed, I dwelt next door, Mrs. Arnold Major took Philippa to herself, and had her to dine at lunch-time. For she was (the first time) alone after breakfast. But, though it may appear a trivial merit to note, she was a person so in love with literature, so thoroughly, if easily, accomplished, that not a moment could hang heavy on her hands—not

to mention that she had as much romance as a woman ought to have, which is not little—and would not have wearied of her own sweet dreams and anticipations the whole livelong day. Then of all things, it was innate in her to abhor teaching and finding fault (its necessary consequence, if the teacher be conscientious;) but her organisation was peculiarly sensitive to small, slow, worrying cares—albeit, a being more endurant I have not seen, in the process of real trouble. Yet her design to manage and train Philippa was carried out to the utmost, and for some months it was like the breaking in of the wildest and waywardest strong colt. No failure here though, for Horatia made a clean dash at the child's intellect, whipped it into excitement, and bowed it in the new-felt hunger for knowledge of all sorts, before she meddled with the moral bias, or the paces of the future character. Five ordinary children would have given no

trouble in comparison ; nor was there any of the winsome fondness of some little ones, in this instance, to beguile or lighten the rude task. Horatia also knew very well that her husband could not love the child (loving really no human creature except herself, though she was too modest to find that out for a long time), and that doing his duty by her to the best of his ability, that duty possessed no charm of interest in his eyes.

Dull as such details must be, it is due to such a character as hers to analyse in some slight sort her connections positive, if passionless, with so many other persons. Everyone knows that there are human beings reduced to such a morbid condition that they cannot bear their self-reminders ; nevertheless, this condition may be rather to be pitied than condemned, as should indeed be their feeble incapacity to bear up against solitude (ever a stern test—there is no *solitude* for those

who love.") The loveless fly to such society as they can afford, compass, or come at—they do not enjoy, nor cause enjoyment in it, they simply suspend self-consciousness for a while. Others again, particularly women these, would perish if their own husbands were sole arbiters of their charms—personal, mental, or exceptional. There are, also, women vain enough (I was going to say wicked enough, but retract it, for I am a man) to desire more than their husband's the miserable appreciation of other men—perhaps *the husband's* is no better; but men honour, if they cannot love, a "virtuous woman," and give her full credit for her utmost self-respect. In no such class could Horatia be set down an instant by the most fatuous man or spiteful woman—nor indeed in any class; though exceptional, she was quite as guiltless of eccentricity as free from cant. She was born with social

gifts that it was as natural to her to exercise as to breathe, she pleased all persons, whether they would or no — she fascinated many — troubled by her spells a few. But all this as naturally as (again to say it) she breathed; still the very fact of its being rather through the free motions of her mind she entertained them, than with any particle of sentiment or intention, gave her own performance a zest to herself far racier than any she imparted. Just as she glorified and dramatised the silliest little ballads and least “æsthetic” songs by her remarkable fashion of singing, she uttered witticisms or fathomed subtle intellectual depths more in her own ears than others! — her words were to them diverting pictures — hieroglyphs; she only had the key.

I have no doubt she overvalued her social position (an unusual one), for her husband’s sake at first; dreaming barren visions, beautiful with

love, of its restoring him to his right place, whatever that might be. I am sure the consciousness of possessing more wealth than he never touched nor tainted this sweet phantasy; besides, her tact was perfect, as only in very passionate natures tact ever is—I don't speak of "*jinesse*," the French both of it and its meaning. And so she allowed him perfect liberty in his own affairs; she did not even re-furnish her house; she fitted up no private room for him especially; and I have reason to know her very table was less elaborate than, in Mrs. Le Kyteler's time, on her account it had been. She was so delicate that, if a parcel came directed to him unpaid, she never paid it, but let it alone till his return. Still, be it understood, wherever the wife's rights, personal or other, were concerned, she was as jealous as ever he, and as tenacious of them. No servant dared to touch his clothes, his books, the very pen he wrote with last. I

did not dare any more to correct the "Madras" proofs, an item of labour which he had left to me and she snatched from me; ordering me not to inform against *her*.

It was a curious household, and I don't think many wives and husbands behave as they did. To return to the "society" point, it had (if never more than a pleasure that fatigued her agreeably before) become a positive annoyance now to her to adhere to her former customs; yet she did so, and, I am sure, thought it her duty all the more because "their glory had departed." After those "afternoons" in which such crowds were concerned, and to which they rushed all the more now she was married, to see what she would do, say, look under those remarkable circumstances; after having entertained them charmingly, and received and dismissed them with kindness rarer than courtesy, if felt, as hers was; I have seen her pale,

excessively tired, but never sinking, nor giving way; only wearing on her brow, and in her eyes, the yearning anxiety for *his* return, the waiting patience, very touching in an impatient temperament like hers. And when he came, behold, it was no more! but it returned when he departed, even for an hour.

I detest, because they are radically, on physical principles, false, those delineations, so favourite in conjugal romances (written by the *unwedded* always), in which husbands and wives are made to torment each other, and rupture the law of marriage twice an hour by hidden or obtuse jealousies, constitutional irritabilities, tempers "sore with tenderness," delirious mutual or one-sided suspicions, all which convulsed deviations from the average of the "two made one" are reported and commented upon, on either part, to any person, however insignificant, who does not happen to be the natural and authorised recipient of such mysterious

miseries, *i.e.*, the man or his wife themselves; the man for his wife, the wife for her husband.

Arnold Major was a jealous man—all *lovers* are—Horatia a jealous woman—all loving women will be; but in neither of them it induced want of confidence, nor any maleficent or morbid frame. Of course they suffered from it, he the most I think, and yet I don't know, when I recollect her gratitude at the end, when she really found how entirely she was his all; a fact she took long time to learn. If he suffered from his jealousy, it was not because he fancied her smiling on another man, even as a friend, in his absence—not that he doubted her (almost amusing) coldness when she sang duets, or took part in concerted music according to her girlish habit, become a part of nature—not that he fancied her for an instant oblivious of her own beloved, in absence. But there was in him, just as he had expressed it once, an

unmeasurable power of loving, that could not fulfil itself in this short life, and that yet asked every instant of time bestowed on man, to prepare himself and his soul's soul for the food and fashion of eternity. To do him justice, and prove his integrity of faith in her, I recollect the only time I ever heard him allude to those same re-unions of Horatia's acquaintances. It was thus; I happened to be present, a rare thing then.

"Did Lord Wilders come again, and did you sing together?"

"Yes," said Horatia; "the same things. He *does* carry his conservatism into his singing, as into everything else, and he *will* discover imperfections, till the standard of perfection is lost."

"Does it tire you *very* much?"

"No, not the least. I am too idle not to like grinding at the old better than learning the new."

"It is all right, then, but I will not have you fatigued more than *must be*."

This was all, save that the "must be" rang in my ears. It meant something, it was a beginning, or a hint—of what? Let it not be imagined that Arnold Major was devoid of spirit, or that he could not hold his own. A very few months after their marriage they went one night to a ball. She, splendidly dressed, and with two exquisite and most *extravagant* bouquets he brought her, one for the bosom, and one for the hand. Though to go out, as a fact, afforded him no gratification, he was radiant with pride to take *her* out, and truly as far as his mere "apparition's shell" was concerned, she had reason to be proud of him. He was too well put together not to be a good dancer too, but he danced idly, like one who dreams deeper "within a dream." Dancing did not excite him the least, but music did, almost beyond enthusiasm.

However, this was an immense ball, one of those last efforts of the season to perish gorgeously, like a dolphin dying, at a very grand house where scarce a commoner was ever asked, and to which it really was a fine thing to have been. Such an awfully hot August night it was! Through Mrs. Arnold Major, who could get anything out of anybody for anyone, I had received an invitation, and accepted it solely out of curiosity on my friend's account. I had plenty of leisure, of course, to watch them. The rooms, vast for a private mansion, were reeking with breaths and perfumes, lined with such hot-house flowers as should never be brought into a dance save in the open air, for instance, the African jessamine, and purple heliotrope, with quantities of orange-shrubs in bloom. The air was positively sick with the luscious mist. It made me giddy, and I saw rings round the lustres; to crown all, a distant storm spent

and spit its last spite upon us, and through the windows, flung wide open, the electric smiles played over the bright twinkling show till twelve o'clock.

At five in the vivid August morning we went home. Horatia, much too exhausted to speak or stir, lay back in her husband's arms, in the carriage, and he actually carried her up to bed. Three hours afterwards he came down to breakfast without her, having ordered her to remain in bed; I knew this, because he was obliged to speak to me about a message he had to take, in answer to Brown, from me.

She did not leave her room all day, until half an hour before the usual one of his return. Then she too sent for me rather peremptorily,—it was, however, a case of exigency, in which she found herself at fault (she did not allow it in the least!) for the Madras proofs were sent for, and found want-

ing. We kept the boy waiting while we retouched them between us, and then fearful, as I knew, of hurting my feelings by making even the least use of me, she insisted on my remaining with her even to dine; she pretended too, that she did not expect him to come home.

This was only the reaction of an exceedingly fine sense of justice,—she was heartily vexed that her husband did not dance the night before, except once with herself. Arnold Major was neither straight-laced nor old-fashioned; a more liberal person did not live, but it was next to impossible he should not try his wife's nerves, if not her temper, the first year of marriage. She was vexed, not that he had danced with no woman but herself (not a woman ever so jealously craved her husband's every smile and gesture of devotion for herself alone), but that she had quite thoughtlessly and naturally, at the time, danced with

all who invited her; in Horatia's case these could not be few.

By the way, just to defend Arnold Major from the lightest charge of primness—which his very soul abhorred—I have seen him dance on various light and bright occasions since, as he would have romped with children, or rifled his own orchard to shower “golden apples” on a parcel of school-boys; but on this occasion he himself, new to his great happiness, too great to compass in a hurry, and not yet even *semi-realised*; when festivity was positively run desperate, and the festal throng moved rather in “melting durance,” than for love of even “the divinity of custom,” I was not surprised at him, nay, I even sympathised with him, for being passive at the time, and much disgusted afterwards.

While waiting for him (I knew he would come, and so did she, whatever she pretended), I could see she was really ill, white as a sheet,

with the black-blue shadows under her eyes that denote intense exhaustion; deepened, instead of lightened, by uneasy sleep. I fancied, indeed felt sure, she had fretted all day to tears—those all spent now—for any but her husband to behold them, she would, I dare say, have deemed a sacrilege. Besides the premier vexation, I could tell she had been dreadfully vexed not to make his breakfast (for the first time omitted since their marriage, I knew through his proud assertion; he never wearied of praising her if he only saw me for a few minutes.)

He came in rather before the usual time, and I saw one of their embraces—a beautiful sight. “Their every parting must have been to die,” for such long, speechless, pressure in each other’s arms had something almost mournful in it. Hearts sobbing under the great waves of an overwhelming passion, calmed by love—and yet not stilled for

ever; the tide felt every motion of the changing moon!

He looked dreadfully tired himself; but, I thought, it was cruel of him to fasten such a look on her, of wild reproach, half tragic—quite more than the occasion warranted. He could not help it, though, and she did not dislike it, for she knew its well-spring.

“I will not have it again!” he exclaimed, in eager, heartwrung tones (I knew he didn’t perceive me, if she did). “I will have no more of your life drained out of you by these vampires, who would not even regret you if you were dead; but” (I knew he meant it) “who would only revenge themselves on your departure by devouring some one else.”

How she laughed! half nervously, because I was there, half with her sense of the absurd, stricken at its highest pitch by his sublime treatment of a very trivial fact.

His arms were round her still, and she spoke low in answer; but her excessively clear voice only seemed distincter in a whisper.

"I thrive very well on the vampirism, I suppose I wanted depleting. And you have been working all day, so it is good for you to reproach me with being idle! I like it, it appeases my conscience a little."

Without (as it seemed) heeding her light words, he went on :—

"I will have no more August dancing; it is horrible torment, worthy of the Inquisition."

"There won't be any more this year—there can't."

"There will be another August—promise me."

"For all the future summers! I certainly shall never dance again, unless you allow

me to come down next day as soon as you do."

This was all. Certainly, the next August saw neither of them at "the dancing," for better reasons than Arnold Major's then.

Another source of vague annoyance to them both was the child Philippa. She grew in stature and knowingness, if not in wisdom, excessively fast, and was ever in the way. I fancy no house, no palace, would have been big enough to get rid of her in; she so persisted in haunting places where she was not wanted. I knew that her uncle had resolved to send her to a school of the very best sort, where she should be kept till bed-time out of the way; but this Horatia never would permit, and as far as the child was concerned, she was perfectly right. The chief annoyance she occasioned to him was, that daily and hourly she was on his wife; the crowning one to her that

the child annoyed *him*. She was a care and a handful, or rather a handful of cares; if she ever had been tired or spent, or if one could have made her fond of books, or anxious to learn drawing; but no, neither pursuits found favour in her eyes, though, like a rough, unkempt scamp of a Skye-terrier, she adored Horatia, and held fast on to her. This the lady only allowed, of course, while her husband was away, apportioning a large empty room at my end of the house to both the children, though empty it was not, for all sorts of old toys, and queer, past-use articles of childish or nursery virtu found place there—a few gymnastic poles and a first-rate swing among the rest; also an old rocking-horse, besides a great deal of Arnold Major's furniture from the old house was stowed there also, the best part of the said furniture having been ordained by him to fill the rooms

which I and Hilary occupied—the children's own little beds, baths, &c., having been quietly permitted by the mistress of the household to be retained for them instead of new ones, or any of her own.

In a moment of rare confidingness (rarer now she was won instead of wooed,) Horatia had expressed to me her regret that she could not give Philippa a pony.

"It is hard," said she, "that whatever I can do (and it is little) for the children, I dare not do till I am dead. If we were in the country, she could scour and rummage everywhere on a sure-footed Shetland by herself; but here, there must be a groom, or at least a mount of some sort after her, or she would be run over; and as I have not been used to keep riding-horses, why, I can't, because—" A sweet smile finished up the reason.

Of course Philippa was ordained to remain

in the play-room all the evening, unless sent for, which I recollect happening once when I was sent for too. I fancy Horatia was afraid either of us should feel neglected; as if that imp could ever perceive neglect! And Philippa, never allowed to climb on her aunt's lap (oh! poor Arnold Major! how that word made him wince and shiver when she used it; I can't tell who taught it her, unless the servants); Philippa would throw her wild arms round Horatia's neck, half strangling her, and dealing immense smacks, that by Brobdignagian courtesy only could be termed kisses, all over her face. Almost sternly—his cheeks burning—Arnold Major tore the nuisance off, and, I believe, by his marked disapproval, he drew down on his own head the "ignorant thing's" revenge. For scarcely a day afterwards, Philippa found her way into the drawing-room while they were at

dinner and I engaged with Hilary; often enough she played "Mag's diversions" there on a wet afternoon when it was not visitors' day, and whatever she broke, injured, or upset in her schemes Horatia (very firmly reproving her though), took care to remove all signs of before her husband should come home. This time I mention (Philippa imparted to me in after confidence, which I won on purpose), she heard them coming upstairs, and, frightened to be found there (curious, I suspected, also), crawled under the largest sofa, and lay there *perdue* all her length. Heard them enter the room, heard various other sounds—she took care to lie still—was privy to such sweet secret conversation as the little bird of the proverb of the softest wing and voice hears not—repeats not—in common with ruder secrets! Meantime, Horatia being tired, and the autumn evening a wild, wet one, her husband drew

the sofa for her near the fire—discovered the intruder, who only escaped without reprimand because they were both too annoyed to find words or time to scold her. She came tearing up to me, and told me everything straight out. For a few instants I hesitated whether to show her I was exceedingly angry, and order her to tell no one else; but I decided to let it alone, as my very interest in the matter would incite her to take more than she felt herself—a mere passing one, born of high health and rampant curiosity, as it proved.

If I could do little or nothing in the matter of Philippa, I was thankful to find that at least the boy became my care alone; he chose it to be so, or so it had not been. Of melting heart, relenting temper, he shewed no more sign than she did. But one could not deal with either of them as with the “happy-born;” their disadvantages pressed

prejudice backwards, and wooed benevolence in double measure to overflow on their behalf. As for religious character, that seemed fanatically developed in little Hilary—a morbid predisposition to remorse, to superstitious awe that had no spring in faith, but only in his fear, a fear nurtured by precocious grief (as weeds grow rank in wild churchyards, that in the pure sun would dwarf and wither). As he got hold of all sorts of books—and there were strange books, though none evil, in the house—he took a singular infection from that new class of literature, professing to reconcile the highest spiritual mysteries with the simplest natural facts, and to explain the one by the other as easily as the chemical composition of soda water; books very interesting to the adult and high-class literarian, who, as much as an honest surgeon must learn pathology, should study every manifestation

of the "spiritual body," in order to test and appreciate the sound and healthy "animal magnetism." Not the standard pillars of the science, but the off-shoot tracts, theses, and American pamphlets on odyle and clearseeing: (not the noble classics, which are almost poems, of those poetic facts), but all kinds of collections of dream and ghost stories, many true, some false—(not dictated nor meant so); nay, even the new and startling *re-revivals* of witch-power, crystal divination, and fate-casting, with which the broad sea of modern generalistic publication is sprinkled unawares, (quite rightly, too, for the angling of those who are mature, or who have the prematurity of genius); such books unknown to myself, (I was too busy in more matter-of-fact fashion to heed his play-hours) did Hilary suck down and retain, to the irritation of his intellectual "plexus," in an undigested mass. As nightmare springs

from bodily indigestion, so did the intellectual plethora react. The horrible and grotesque play equal parts in "incubus;" therefore, in his case, the morbid and the sad did so. A positive magnetic predisposition, too, made such pursuits more dangerous for him; he would lie on the rug for hours, his eyeballs, turned up to the ceiling, fixed and filled with hazy gleams and shoots of sudden radiance, most unchildlike—above all, unboy-like; to me most painful: or would elude me after my most elaborate efforts to interest him in some wild, breathless narrative of travel or adventure, or novel phenomenon of science more like faëry than is all magic; would then escape to some dark room or corner, and watch the lambent light—that licks the edges of *all* crystals seen in darkness by a vivid vision—in scraps of sugar. Often he declared to me he saw ghosts; I know he never did; "the magnetic eye is

not the eye of the clear-seer," says one who is wise upon the subject. If he had been born in certain circles, or certain novelty-ridden persons had got hold of him, he would have been spoiled for any active part in life, and sunk into a prodigy. Whatever must happen to him, I was resolved that *this* should not.

It was the worst house he could have possibly come into; for, one scarcely knew how, a constant excitement pervaded it, and had he been a poetical child, this would have done him good as well as harm. Horatia's singing, when it came swelling from beneath, blanched him, made his eyes grow dark, with dilated pupils surcharged with weird expression; and for hours after, he was, without being able to help it, too unstrung to learn. Yet no cathedral music—I had often taken him to the Abbey — had on him the least effect,

though I have seen him start and turn momentarily rigid at the boom of a deep-toned bell.

Still, there was nothing to fasten on as a positive fault in him ; he obeyed me better than any one, and with a better grace ; learned faster than ever, procuring himself just so much more time to dream ; nor was he actually rude to his uncle, as he had been wont, when they happened to meet. I think Horatia set on the boy a spell of reverence, enforced by hers towards him she alone revered in all the world. Arnold Major was precise about the child ; never failed to examine me as to his progress, periodically ; was ever asking my advice, which it would have been vain to give, since, under the circumstances, it could not be followed ; for I felt only the best of the best of public schools would be of any use ; the child, though still so young,

being more than ready for such a destination intellectually, while morally he wanted to be born again to boyhood.

I have said Arnold Major was conscientious; but for his anxiety, I can say nothing. None of us are perfect; and perhaps a perfect man would partake more of the nature of prig than angel. So here I must insert that my friends at this time realised Lavater's phrase of "attention without interest," with reference to all persons and subjects except his wife. Starved long on hopeless love, held long in durance viler than despair, riven suddenly, as if by death—transported in an instant, as it were, into the innermost recesses of that mysterious Paradise, round whose very gates hang fragrances that make the shut-out strangers giddy even to breathe—how could he be blamed if all humanity was veiled from his heart awhile—if cares and duties swept by him, unheeded, not unful-

filled? For, harder than he had ever worked before, he must have worked now, to get home every day an hour earlier than before his marriage. This was indeed the case! His work must have been done too, for the house of Brown, Jones, & Co. would have discharged any unfulfilling or mis-fulfilling of its servants, at a moment's notice.

How intensely happy he was!—though no need to him of partings to heighten the bliss of meeting. I believe that those transient daily separations of this husband and this wife produced peculiar results, which would not have been brought to fruition in less developed natures than theirs, even if devoted to each other. Such daily separations may have sharpened the bliss of restoration to him, but his nature was too earnest to require intensifying, and the intensification of such pleasure was but pain. And for her—she was a woman who could

not but suffer from suspense, the very shortest, concerning him with whom she was made one. Also, there lay deep nestled in her bosom a strange but true instinct of having been unfairly judged by him—even unfairly treated by him (seeing how he loved her), for several lonely years. When he was with her, her generous wifehood rose superior over this dim darkling instinct—as the dayspring overflows the twilight; but in his brief frequent absences, it woke and fluttered like a wounded bird within her. I knew it by my gift of sympathy—a kind of moral divination—which gift I hope I never have abused, but sometimes used for good. It was nobler than any one would allow it to be, that she devoted herself to that child Philippa, for her whole nature was in a state of delicate irritability from the overshadowing presence of the absent—if such a phrase may be used—and her organisation

was thrilling from head to foot through every fibre, like the mimosa lately touched by the finger that pressed, then left it.

They were in fact, both of them, beings who could not understand each other fully till every mystery was fulfilled, of sorrow as of love, of faith as well as passion.

CHAPTER IV.

CHANGE OF WEATHER.

THEY gave only four dinner-parties that winter—Horatia had been accustomed to give half-a-dozen every year: this time, I fancy as much for her own sake as her husband's, she curtailed the number. Scarcely would it have been graceful on her part, if feasible, to entertain no friends at all in her own established fashion; for such friends as formed her circle on those special occa-

sions had been friends of her father and known her all her life. She was, I think, vexed with me because I would not accept her invariable invitations; at all events, for the last time she would take no negative, and I went down perforce. I was not sorry; I had never seen her, rather, I should say, had never *heard* her, so brilliant, and I recollect thinking in the midst that it would surely be as hard, even as unnatural, for her to abstain from society altogether, as for a fine dramatic genius to "cut" the stage. And certainly in the mere part of hostess, she was perfect, for she was *kind*, a rare concomitant even of the grandest courtesy. I only mention this dinner at all, because at it I remarked a guest who looked like an intruder, and whom, albeit, she treated with a special and distinctive kindness, almost implying gratitude or cause for gratitude on her part, or some peculiar

connection between herself and him. When I say he looked like an intruder, I don't mean he failed in self-possession, or did, on the point of the palate, make himself at home; but he was so abstracted, cast such stealthy glances about, then, as it were, pulled himself up mentally, and seemed doubly (as I fancied), unconcerned with any but the passing engagement. Once he peeped at me,—I fear I have the knack of attracting eyes by mine, and if I may use such a phrase of *eye-reading*; at all events I have made scores of individuals, whose gaze I had attracted with mine, avert their eyes directly afterwards, and never meet them again so long as I was in their company. Such of these persons as I had the chance of knowing in the sequel, I always found sly, dishonourable, or possessed of some doubtful quality or impure secret. But of an eye that turns not from me, I

am certain God looks out of such with the soul.

I only meant to notice, however, that this man peeped at me. I gazed full at him, and he shrank visually. I saw no more of his eyes, and could not tell their colour afterwards, nor ever recall their expression. He was a dapper gentleman, grave, grey, and rather reverend, who laughed much at the sallies of the hostess even when they were *serious* (a peculiar quality of Horatia's wit), but who never smiled—who had no smile, I thought. He was devoted to her in manner and action, however, and once, only once—as she passed out of the room at the head of her sister stars—“their sphered music silent in her sphere,”—I saw his face soften, a mournful pity quivered darkly over it an instant; in an instant it was gone, and his face set harder than before. I am certain no one else re-

marked it ; in general men are no wiser physiognomists than they are jurors, perhaps not so good.

He looked almost like a man preparing for a heavy illness, who sinks into a pathetic languor, and rouses himself alternately ; and who will not give in till he must. This showed more to me after the men were alone (for as short an interval as might *possibly* be—an apology for etiquette, indeed ; this the fault of the polite but very impatient host !). Next day, of course, I sent to enquire after Mrs. Major's health. She sent for me thereon (I knew she would) and I went down, expecting by instinct a reprimand.

“Why ?” asks the reader. Listen !

She always looked particularly interesting when tired, a rare thing with women this sickly age. She was sitting back in a very easy chair, fitting some plain work for Philippa ; (she made her learn to work, all honour to her for that). The fine lawn looked

very snowy and pretty in her hands; she had taken to rings again on the right hand, which glittered like an iris, on the left the wedding glory shone alone, and right vain was she of that tiny circlet, twisting it every way while she talked—anon covering it with the other hand jealously, as if she thought I might suddenly desire to steal it. She was soft and saucy together, one of her happiest moods.

“I always knew you were dreadfully unsociable, but I *did* think you would forego your prejudices for the sake of your friends,” she began straight out.

“What *did* I do?” I asked innocently.

“Nothing—that was the miss. I never thought you vain before—on the contrary, I believed you modest.”

“Vain! am I?”

“You *must* be so; I know not a person—certainly not among young gentlemen of my acquaintance—who can talk more prettily than

you do, when you choose. You are neither slow nor ignorant when *out of your own books*," (Did she mean I was slow and ignorant in them?)—"as you would make people believe. You carry the poet into prosaic circles at the risk of disenchanting them of the notion they have just managed to entertain, that *possibly* you are one. A poet, I mean."

"I don't *write* poetry, I am sure."

"You know I think that a mistake also—" (she was resolved to lecture me). "You clip and trim your ideas to make them march in prosaic lines, whereas 'winged words' fall sweetest, even on untuned ears."

"Next time I write it shall be a poem, and I shall get nothing for it, even if it shall be printed, instead of getting seventy or eighty pounds for a clipped and trimmed 'ideal' tale, that in prosaic lines 'drags its slow length along.'"

"I thought you meant to be very brilliant,"

she went on—"you looked so unusually accommodating."

"Mrs. Major! There was somebody you wanted me to please, then; pray tell me who—pity you did not tell me beforehand."

"I knew you wouldn't come at all then! Don't be angry if I say that all *men* are not your admirers, for, in compensation, I know not one woman who is not your adoresse."

"Delicious! Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient, &c."

"Did you remark the gentleman on my right hand?"

"Particularly. But if he be my admirer, he showed it curiously; he *would* not look at me. And do you know, I thought he looked strangely uncomfortable, considering his proximity to yourself."

"Are you serious? I never quite know whether you mean more than you say, or simply say much more than you mean? I

should be sorry if he were even uncomfortable. And in a social sense, I know no one so capable of comfort."

"Ah, it must have been one of my hallucinations—perhaps that celestial soup disagreed with his mortal stomach. It did taste like the 'brains of nightingales' distilled in gravy from 'Balzac's' game. Did you know he had a preserve fed on sugar and nothing else, and all for his own eating?"

She sat quite up. "I don't think I *half* like your fashion of rambling in by-ways of reading—it makes your books unflavourable to the matter of fact? Now that man was one of the few who take a desperate fancy to your books—he would have done anything—have bought any number I bade him—and he wanted to see you."

"He didn't look as if he did! Who is he, may I ask?"

"You would have known if you had been

out as much as you ought. He is the great banker, Rupert Petres—perhaps the greatest going, certainly one of the fastest and longest. He was my father's very dear friend for years and years—and my mother's long before I was born."

"No wonder you feel so strongly for him then—I can understand—but then you see he was not *my* father's and mother's friend, and didn't know *me* long before I was born,—I mean—"

"You mean you are dreaming very far off the mark. Never mind! It is certainly very mean of me to find fault with you, when I am just going to ask you the very greatest favour that—"

"That what"—? for she hesitated—"that a lazy lady can ask a fast young gentleman. I want to give a children's party, just before Christmas—on Christmas eve, I think—I know so many little dears. They will have

a tree, of course, and I shall look after that, also a comical magic lantern and marionettes; but I want something striking to *begin* with. You see I can't bear those little plays written for children, to curb their pretty tongues—and yet for the first half-hour, unless they are disposed of, they are apt to do dreadful things on a small scale, and not to amuse themselves, as the French say."

I saw it all!—the excuse veiling the design. In reality she wanted to do honour to Arnold Major in the persons of Hilary and Philippa—he could not complain either, that it was on their account, if she invited a party of her friends' children! but the fear of "dreadful things" was of course as clearly founded upon Philippa's peculiar idiosyncrasy, as that of the non-amusement on Hilary's. However, I felt instantly I could help her here, and grateful to her

that she asked me. "Will you leave it all to me then—entirely?"

"Certainly not," quite indignant! "How do I know how much you will want to spend—choose rather—for I know you would just ruin yourself to produce a startling ephemera—or ephemeron—which is it, you know Greek?"

"I beg your pardon, I should not think of insulting you so far; it would be indeed (in the words of a great Wit,) 'robbing the poor-box to pay the bank of England!' I will either give you an estimate, or send you in an account."

"I never have accounts—I hate them. Can't you give me the least idea?"

"You shall give me ten pounds, and I will give you the residue."

"Gracious! you can't do anything with *that*."

"Can't I?" I thought. "Indeed, Mrs.

Major, I can, and no one ought to spend more on such a thing—nay, no one need so much.”

She gave me the money then and there. How she delighted in being rich,—all generous persons do, particularly women, I fancy; wealth gives them, in their own opinion, an extra strength—until they experience its worthlessness, unless *other support* accompanies it.

“Now,” she said coaxingly, “do tell me what you are going to have?”

“A tableau (I hate the term) a *picture*, from the “Midsummer Night’s Dream—”

“Oh, please, no—it will be so awfully flat—the dregs of all the pantomimes mixed together.”

“You will see;—I shall have Mendelssohn’s music to it.”

“I can’t allow that—it would be absolutely *dead*.”

"Wait till you hear my rehearsal of it; I shan't permit one to be seen."

Next day I wrote a note to John, and asked him a favour on my own account. It was to lend me, for one day and night, a certain superb stuffed owl in the "collection," and a marvellous musical snuff box, item; the latter had been manufactured by a German, who, it almost seemed, must have had a myriad fingers to make it, and at least, three brains to invent. It was as big as a street-organ, and it played Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," Purcell's "Hymn on Charles I.", all the chorales from Bach's "Passione," Cimarosa's "Hochzeit durch List," Weber's Jubilee, "Ranz des Vâches," and all the "Midsummer Night's Dream" of Mendelssohn. The man who made it had spent all his patrimony on it—sold every bit of his furniture to finish it, save the bench it stood on in his garret, and the

needful tools; borrowed five pounds on it to come to England, and pawned his only coat to advertise it. My uncle had, of course, heard of it; and finally bought it for five hundred pounds, with which the German bought a tiny tobacco business in the Minories, and died of smoking, three years afterwards, worth quite five thousand pounds.

I bade John (if he chose to oblige me) let me know when I might fetch it; but lo! the very next afternoon he came in a hired Uglyvillian fly with it and the owl, the latter in a *game basket* of the largest size, and the former in his own arms, wrapped in the library table-cloth! I thought Horatia would have died of laughing when she saw him. Of course, having heard of him before, she was all her generous self to him—wanted him to come upstairs, but he persisted in sitting in the hall; and also in believing it was my house, earned by my literary per-

formances. Horatia could not make him move even into the dining-room, nor would he drink a glass of wine.

Arnold Major passed through the hall while he was sitting there—stopped, as he ever did when attracted by her atmosphere—said something about her catching cold, and drew her in his arm away.

“Is that her brother, Mr. Ernest?”

“No, John, her husband.”

“She ought to have had you.”

I never heard him express the least feminine penchant before, and this was his method of denoting his enslavement by Horatia :—

“She has a pretty tongue. She ought to have had you, or, otherwise, she ought to have had your uncle.”

Did he think wives descended literally from one man to his heir? Poor Horatia!—well for her she had her choice within her doom.

John would only stop to give, as he expressed it, the "horse a smoke;" by which I concluded he had pelted in style from Uglyville. Then he asked for a glass of water—"because it costs nothing."

"Is there anything else I could do, Mr. Ernest?" with his head on one side.

"You can send me, not bring them, mind, a lot of ivy and holly—all sorts of evergreens—and a great deal of moss, that flat moss, you know, John, that lines the very bottom of the dell."

I knew that would "cost nothing." And on Christmas-eve morning came a cart John had hired of a carrier, quite full of such greenery. Enough to represent Birnam Wood on any stage.

Mrs. Major wanted to hire a portable theatre, dresses, &c., but I could not bear such a thing, one sees them everyday now. We quarrelled a little bit, and then she

gracefully resigned. I saved her something in cost, and as for the materials,—a few sheets of rose-coloured and azure tissue paper, two old oil lamps with globes, never used except by her servants, and a quantity of fresh flowers (I would none of artificial) were all I used or needed. I have not seen anything half so pretty as my rehearsal, either.

Those irksome children! I had to go almost on my knees to Hilary to take a part at all, and even then it only amounted to his setting the elfin orchestra to work behind the screen, which, veiled completely with evergreens, hid the rose-veiled lamps and other paraphernalia necessarily kept out of sight.

Philippa, wild with being made Oberon (leaning out of an owl's nest, with an owl on the top of it), behaved very well then, and acted capitally, of course, because there was no one

to see, and it was of no consequence. But afterwards, just as I was congratulating myself, she comes to me (all the wee actors being gone):—

“Uncle, you ought to let me squeeze the flower.”

“Why so?—nonsense; you did it very nicely.”

“It says ‘squeezes’ in the book, I looked at it—I wanted so to squeeze it.”

“Well, my dear, you can squeeze it if you like!”

Unlucky me! I had selected one of those carnations made of Madeira feathers (Horatia had a quantity of them), a vivid crimson, to outstand the more forcibly in the picture, rather than with strict regard to the text; and, justly, I did not think it mattered whether she squeezed it or not; it might keep her more statuesque to do so. Unluckily also, she didn’t like “Titania,” a grandchild of the very Rupert

Petres whom Horatia affected so much; in fact it was at Mrs. Major's own request I made her Titania in the group, for all the other little creatures were fairer far than she; only, she, being excessively small (puny), passed well for elfin, with her eyes shut, and recumbent on a thousand flowers (green baize under them, to carry out the moss-tints I had heaved into my sloping background).

"I don't like that child," said Philippa to me, additionally, that night. "If I had been Oberon, she should have seen a great bear after the flower, to eat her up."

"Never mind, and be sure to keep still; it is only a picture, you must remember," said I, "for if it was not a very pretty picture, I should be so ashamed."

In the very middle of the *sweet, sweet* overture, tinkling as from all the leaves at once (the picture was only to last so long), when forty real fairies were dimpling, peeping,

and shining in every attitude of baby art (I let them all smile, provided they didn't laugh), when the eight solemn little creatures who fanned the queen with real palms (I got those through Horatia's universal interest at Kew Gardens) were fanning as if they would never tire,—when the audience (all papas, mammas, and nurses) were breathless with delight and vanity,—suddenly Titania shrieked, jumped up, ran down the bank, tumbling over all her attendants in front, snatched at the screen and pulled it over, still screaming, while her mother, a fashionable young woman of the highest water, sent her head nurse to see what was the matter.

The matter was that Philippa had privily soaked the carnation in Horatia's Bohemian flask of eau-de-cologne, and the feathers had retained the moisture like sponge, till the right (or wrong) moment, when Oberon had discharged it straight into Titania's eyes.

I only mention this little incident because it was like the initial misfortune to what came afterwards.

I never saw Arnold Major (who, ardent as he might be, had the sweetest disposition—sweet as his wife's) in such a downright passion. While Horatia, having carried off the squealing little patient to her dressing-room, and there established her with her nurse, was setting on the puppets in the play-room, lighted and prepared on purpose,—I, still standing discomfited in the background, saw Philippa borne off by her uncle in her fantastic dress. He lifted her bodily, and vanished with his burden at a door behind the overtopped screen.

Wondering what he had done with her (all the children were cleared out of the drawing-room by this time), I bethought myself to go and see, and left Hilary still sitting on the floor, in the middle of the moss, listening to the

musical box. He would *not* go with the rest.

On the second floor was the set of rooms I inhabited with Hilary, shut in by double doors of baize. On this landing was a lofty staircase window. There was no moonlight, or I should have seen in time, and retreated from, two figures. They were whispering; I knew them instantly, and was turning on my heel to go, when *one* of them heard me.

"Here," said Horatia, in clear but not untroubled tones, "come and help me, Mr. Loftus, to disenchant this monster—a child-ogre on Christmas Eve!"

"Whatever has he done?" I asked, stopping warily a few steps beneath the landing.

"Sent that poor 'child terrible' to bed! Nay, *put* her there and locked her in. I *know* she didn't mean any harm, whatever monkeyism, for she has seen me bathe my head a hundred thousand times."

There was silence. I could see him press her again and again to his bosom. Then I heard:—

“Oh! my darling, don’t make me remember my selfishness too hardly, for daring to be happy. Have pity—” and then his silent kisses devoured his words again.

The woman’s instinct, never failing, any more than charity, felt my presence there, which, in the tumult left by his late excitement, he felt not after the first moment. She plucked herself very gently away from him, and turned to me. I saw his arms stretch after her, but she eluded them. She chose to do so then.

“Do ask him to let her come and see the Marionettes. Material has more power over the poor mite than immaterial. She meant no harm. He won’t say yes to *me*.”

“—Did you really wish it? I thought it only your benevolence—your tender heart—”

“Hush!”

She put her hand over his mouth. She would not bear compliments from him before another man.

"I do really and sincerely wish it, if you think it right," she added, in the tone of that deference the tyrant-husband crushes under his heel, the *man* cherishes in his heart as the most precious part of a treasure immeasurably precious.

"I did not know you cared so very much. She shall come down directly. Ernest,"—he addressed me, without turning to me—"will you fetch her? The key is only turned outside."

I went readily, but in going I had to pass them close, and I heard Horatia shiver—scarcely strange, the night was Christmas-cold; but it was scarce like her, I thought afterwards, to say:—

"I hope nothing is going to happen. See that shooting star!"

For my part I knew not any superstition connected with shooting-stars. Perhaps she *did*. Had no terrestrial trouble intervened, the celestial apparition would never have been remembered by me, but have faded as its own fair trail in space.

Philippa came down. No more of her—nor of the children's merry evening, which was glorious—Horatia, looking quite herself again, only her *pale* self. Arnold Major looking himself also, as I had seen him look *before* his marriage, when, after his first flush of hope, earthly cares beset him with their thorn-wound fever.

The next day but one, Horatia informed me that she and her husband were going to St. Leonards for a week or ten days, the extent of his leave of absence from business in fact. She said she required sea-air, which meant, of course, she thought *he* did, but *that* she was little likely to say to either of us.

However, I was thankful to see them go, for they deserved more of each other's solitary companionship than they could well attain in London.

The children were, of course, left to me. Fortunately a decided frost set in the very day the travellers departed, and my agonies lest Philippa should demolish the drawing-room furniture, or that of the dressing-room, still more desirable in her eyes, were suspended by her taking a violent fancy to the ice on the Serpentine.

I took her there every afternoon and taught her first to slide and then to skate—for a marvel, Hilary took a liking to the dreamy exercise as well, so that I felt sure I had them safe at least; and in the evenings they were both tired enough to go to bed betimes.

The fifth day a great snow fell—a white veil, dreary as darkness, hid the sky, and

as so often it seems to happen, the spirits of my charges sank with the thermometer—and so did mine. Hilary barricaded himself with his books, but only laid his head on them. Philippa stretched herself on the hearth-rug and scorched herself red-hot. I essayed telling them one of Andersen's tales, but was sure they were not attending—and in the very crisis of it, dull enough even to me, we all started together at a most overpowering street-door knock.

Who could it be? for it was but half-past twelve—the travellers returned, unexpectedly perchance. But no—nor had I long to wait, for a servant (in undress, with exposed shirt-sleeves) brought me a card—Mrs. Le Kyteler—and she must see me instantly.

Mrs. Le Kyteler! who lived all winter long as in a hot-house—who had never effected a single free and easy entrance since

Horatia's marriage. I was awfully alarmed—fear of I know not what constricted my very heart. I flew down-stairs, for she was in the dining-room—she would not come up.

There she was, wrapped up like a Russian to her very mouth in sable—but on my appearance she threw off a heavy cloak and I could see her face.

It wore a deadlier anxiety than mine—her cheeks were scarlet, and her eyes glittered. Nor would she sit down—I therefore stood on the rug—she did not attempt to salute me, but began at once hoarsely and imperiously :—

“In as few words as possible, tell me, do you know through your friend anything about the disposition of his wife's money?”

“I know nothing more than that he is as wholly independent of it as before his marriage.”

“Tush! a good thing to say now he has

housed himself here! Have you ever heard him say whether she transferred her property on her marriage? for she made her will all over again. I know that."

"I never knew where her money was, and I am pretty certain he did not, though he may know now, for I believe their mutual confidence is perfect—"

"No sentiment, if you please — it has ruined more women than play men. Heavens! what fresh disaster?"

It was another knock—in an instant a gentleman came running in, his military great-coat whiter than his whiskers, scarcely whiter than his face. It was Sir Verveyne Waters — I knew him instantly, though I had only seen him at the wedding—a man I liked exceedingly.

"I use no ceremony," he said. "I am sorry to see you here, madam — how fast flies ill-boding news!"

"Is it quite true, then — certain? no hope?"

"Dead-locked—not a shutter down—they say he has blown his *brains* out. No such chance—I know better! Mr. Loftus, *how* is Mrs. Arnold Major? her people tell me she is at the sea—not ill, I *trust*."

"No, as well as usual—they only went for ten days, and this is the fifth."

"No good to question him, Sir Verveine," said Mrs. Le Kyteler, petulantly, "young men never know anything that is of any use. I have asked him already—his conviction is of course, that the husband is incorruptible—not much to the purpose."

"A great deal to the purpose," said the officer gravely—"if misfortune falls heavy on a tender woman, well for her if her life's support is incorruptible. In this hour I am glad she made her choice thus." Then he turned to me:

"I know you to be very intimate with Mr. Major,—did you ever hear him express disapprobation of the house she banked at? I have done it many and many a time to her."

"Never in a word—nor hint—"

"Do you think you would alarm her if you went down to them—suddenly and asked to see him?"

"I could prevent its alarming her, I am sure."

"I will go with you in the train—we shall catch one in three quarters of an hour,—and on the road I will tell you my worst fears." He just bowed to Mrs. Le Kyteler—who said (she must have been in extremity of alarm to be so unselfish)—
"Pray take my carriage, and send it back here for me,—I will wait, it is so much quicker than a cab."

So we went in her brougham. Oh!

that journey on the snow-blocked line, when we seemed whirling on wheels of ice down some Alpine precipice! anon were stuck as if frozen to the drift. I will not write down our conversation—it is useless to rack memory, nor does it teach endurance; it was short and sad—and I began to think I had underrated real troubles in overrating spiritual woes.

On reaching St. Leonard's, we drove first to a stationer's: I bought a blank white sheet, enveloped and directed it to Arnold Major in a hand unlike my own. Then straight to the address they had sent me—one of those large pretty houses fronting the fair sea—now dim and smoke-tinted against the dazzling snow-shower. We stopped in fact four doors off, and I went to their door alone. They were in the drawing-room—passing up the wide warm stairs I heard her laugh—it rang out as from the

fulness of deep delight;—I had sent up no card, for fear of frightening her, but merely my name, and a message that I had brought a note on business.

Arnold Major opened the door, and I saw into the luxurious drawing-room, with its crimson long curtains and enormous fire,—Horatia, in a delicious easy chair, basked full in the golden blaze.

I know not what he read in my face, but he came out and *all* but shut the door behind him.

“Only a note from Brown, Jones, & Co. about some business—it seemed immediate, so having nothing to do, I brought it—particularly as it was not to come by post.”

I held it to him—but Horatia heard at least *one* word—for she rushed to the door and dragged it open:—

“Did you say Brown & Jones had *failed*?”—she asked vehemently.

"No, no, Mrs. Major,"—I felt as if I should choke;—her first thought for her husband had inadvertently glanced so strangely near the truth for *her*.

How should I get rid of her?—through her pride, of course.

"They said you were to read it alone, and give your answer"—she retreated not, but cast a jealous eye at me, as to say, "*You are not necessary to his solitude if I am banished.*" *He saw something* doom-like, I suppose, in my regard, for already his own reflected it.

"We will go downstairs an instant"—this to me, he did not trust himself to look at her.

"You cannot go downstairs," said she, excitedly, (I knew she fancied something too)—"for we have not engaged the dining-room, and there are people in it—I will go upstairs, if need be, and you can re-

main. Mr. Loftus, *is* it anything about my husband?"

She pressed close to me, and poured all the wife-love of her looks full into mine.

"No—on my conscience—by my soul!"

"Still, it would seem something serious, that you speak so. Does it concern *me*?"

"I don't know—it may."

I glanced at Arnold Major, and saw he did not disapprove my straightforwardness.

"What is it?—don't bore me, please!"

"Two friends of yours came to me to-day, to tell me that Petres had stopped payment, yesterday."

A moment, she turned her piteous eyes towards him—eyes of the wounded hart;—she reeled into his arms, then tore herself away abruptly—I never saw her so ungentle.

He would have held her yet—he did yet hold her hands. Great tears rushed into his eyes, veiling such tenderness as I never saw expressed in mortal face before or since, but hers were dry and emptied of expression, while all the haughtiness, all the waywardness, all the passion of her nature, seemed fighting in her face.

Again and again his eyes of love, his longing arms, invited her—in vain; she struggled only further from him, her bosom heaving with deep long gasps, that would not melt—her eyes like stone.

“You don’t love me, then,” he said, “half so much as I have loved *you*.”

This was all. But, loving as the words were, they were not *wise*. She dragged her hands from his enfolding ones—her wrists were scarlet with the effort to release them—passed swiftly into the drawing-room, and locked the door—leaving us both out-

side. Even he dared not to follow, *then*.

"*Is* it true, then?" I ventured.

"All—every farthing! Oh, that I had been unselfish enough, brave enough, to advise her! Others have done so, she told me, and that deterred me. What shall I do?" he added, with a singular expression, that was not wholly sad, and going a few steps farther from the door.

"What *shall* I do to make her bear it—brook it?—and this is the wild spirit I thought I had covered with my wings!"

I could have been angry with him for the sudden echo of exultation in his tone. Can it be believed—this man adored her *poor*, with sudden and manifold ecstasy; it was what had been the desire of his desires, though he had never dared to dream it. Realisation of the penalties included came soon enough. I could not grudge such a

momentary triumph to a passionate and noble nature.

“What *shall* I do?” again he said, with pleasure fluttering on his lip.

“Leave her to God and herself. It is bitterly hard for her —”

“Leave her to God!—God gave her to me, and she herself—she is my own—weak wretch that I have been, to doubt an instant! Go downstairs, please—she might not like —”

“To find me there again—quite true.”

I *went* downstairs; but on the way I heard him knock, not rudely, nor loudly—very low; and in an *instant* the door was opened! I don’t think I ever admired her so much as at that very instant.

But just in illustration of her character, I must add, that by no means could I persuade Sir Verveine Waters to let her alone, nor leave her alone with her husband. “I

want to give her a crumb of comfort," said the direct old boy, and went to call on her. I waited outside, of courso. When he came down, and climbed into the cab :

"I always said (along with her father, who meant her to have been a boy) that she was a soldier *spoiled* : she is as plucky as a pigeon sitting on a cannon's neck (I once knew such a bird belonging to a fellow who had saved it, once on a time, from the sportsman's small shot). I don't believe she cares a stiver for losing all her thousands. Poor Standish ! it is enough to pull him out of his grave. I had no idea, either, it was half so much ; she can't be extravagant, like most women. I wish I had anything worth leaving her, but the little I have will be hers, and so I told her. She is a baggage—and nothing can mend it. What do you think she answered?—stared at him straight, and held up her head—'I

think myself the richest woman in England, General, and have now for seven months and more.’”

All very well, I thought—but the baggage is a parcel whose contents you do not know.

CHAPTER V.

LOVE IN A MIST.

It was bitterly hard for her—I repeat it. Of course it was not only improper, but “undisciplined” (is not that the term?), of Horatia to object to lose her fortune; of course it was wicked of her to regret it bitterly—intensely; but such was indeed the case. Only to have lost favour in the eyes of the man she loved, would have been a bitterer and more stony fate in her esteem.

Born generous through every fibre, and of an organisation that almost demanded luxury and respite from care, for its health and well-being, with a temperament susceptible even more fully to pleasure than to pain ; with a nature so intensely passionate that, with a proportionate imagination, she would have been the greatest poetess that ever lived, but which (failing that non-desirable faculty) made her only the more perfect woman :— so far so good, so sweet, so honourable ; but, alas ! as a human being (whatever as a *woman* she might be), she was no more faultless than her lord. Therefore, if he exulted unduly in the fact that her future support would fall on him wholly—that every item of provision she consumed, every rag of raiment she put on, would be procured by and through his earnings, she—well ! her haughty spirit, which took the place in her noble nature

that worldliness takes in a mean one, positively reveled in its own exceeding discomfort; it was as though she sat down with her misery and hugged it breast to breast.

The first time I saw her after the catastrophe (one involving the ruin of scores less able to bear the nakedness of poverty than she), I was surprised at her cheerfulness, her lofty air—it was almost grand! Even *he* trembled at it, who only saw it through the mist of beauty that bathes the beloved one ever for the eyes that love; but I—well, I thought she would be ill afterwards from the violent suppressed excitement (all the wilder because suppressed) which evidently possessed her. The shock fell on her nerves instead, and smashed her energies awhile; I do not believe they would ever have recovered their tone, had not the sharpest remedy of bosom-pain, of

anguish cradled in the blood, struck through all the outworks of sense and passion to the *heart*, the human heart, not the romantic one.

If she rebelled in secret against the edict of what was certainly needless fate, she never showed it by word or strongly-evidenced emotion. But, as I have said, she was not faultless; I must note that her worst error was against her husband; she could not reconcile herself to the dependence on him, which, after all, had been as absolute before, if less palpable; she raged inwardly against her impotence to be his almoner and financial fountain-head; not that actually she had been either yet with his permission, but I knew she always had it in her mind that she excelled him on one material ground; she was content he should surpass her on all the rest.

As for him, he had never before been

miserable. "I was lost for want of her when I had her not; now I have lost *her*, for if she does not love me, she exists not—there is no such being." These were a few of his words to me one evening, while she was, vivaciously and most rationally, superintending the disposition of her personal effects. That same hour she came down while we were together, and remarked:—

"Don't you think that you might go back to the same house you had before?—for they say it is not yet let, and it seemed to suit you so well."

He had been discussing with me quite desperately, whither he should remove. How she had found out about the house, we could neither of us tell, but I appreciated, even as well as he could, the virtue of her volition in alluding to it *first*.

In fact, we *returned* there.

I believe in her first, fresh bitterness, Hora-

tia sought to mortify herself as much as possible (like Job when sat down among the ashes), for nothing could be much more repugnant to her habits, taste, temperament, than that same neighbourhood. But one part of her—and a vital one—was her exceeding philosophic aptitude to make of the worst the best. And, however she might fret and chafe at the conditions which bound her generous hands, and made void her natural impulses to *give*, she never sacrificed an iota of her rights, as wife and mistress. Certainly they lived in the same house, but who could have recognised it? She had sold all her furniture, save that of the room she had shared with *him*, and that transferred made the new one a lesser model of the old; but she had conserved certain articles of ornamental furniture, a number of drawing-room toys and books, her splendid piano of course, and the exquisite foreign filigree flower-stands

that had adorned the stair-windows on every landing, now filled every window in the house; their plants, so carefully tended all along, bloomed brighter than ever, there. For the rest—six weeks had not passed before Arnold Major said to me:—

“It is inconceivable, and must be done by magic. She never even spends what I give her, and see the difference between this time and *ours*.”

Ours in the past tense, because, of course, nothing—neither *his* powers nor *her* smiles induced me to remain in their house.

One can get apartments fit to live in at Islington—the best part of it—at a reasonable rate, which, I fancy, can be said of no other region in or near London, whatsoever; and thus, on my own account merely, I was thankful to escape from an extra debt of gratitude,—what I owed already could never be repaid. Besides, I could *almost* rid them

of Hilary altogether; he stuck fast to me, and even remained with me at night. Meantime, Philippa was the solid incubus of the household yet, and I could not hope to rid it of her, though I had some small share in intercepting her rash inquiries and remarks as to the changes she beheld and experienced. For in the first ferment of excitement in the household before it was broken up, I had taken her alone with me for a long walk, and explained to her very seriously what had happened to her benign, sweet friend. No one knows how much children can understand, and how needless it is to invent fibs for them in order to disguise either natural mysteries or chance facts, from the pure vision of their undistorting innocence. This child was a rough diamond enough, yet the beams struck forth from her at the first touch of the light let in. When I had told her about the bad man, who had been wasting

and spending other people's money for ever so many years, her eyes got bright and rigid. I worked up the tale as highly as possible with side truths ; but when I reached the plain fact about Horatia, she burst out crying violently, and went into premature hysterics. The only way to quiet her, after giving her a very large shaddock to which she had been attracted in a fruiterer's window, was to make a secret of it, as between herself and me, and bid her not to reveal anything I had told her. "No one who is in trouble likes to be talked to of it, because it makes them cry, and no one likes to be seen to cry," was my suggestion.

"No," said Philippa, and dried her eyes abruptly with her gloves, grasping the shaddock yet more firmly.

I wondered whether I had produced any

effect. Positively, yes! That very evening, just before her husband's return, Horatia stood by the fire in the beautiful drawing-room she was so soon to leave—nothing could draw Arnold Major from his daily duty now, it had become his pride and his glory.

Philippa marched in, trying to be quiet, and, of course, making every one of her own footsteps doubly audible. She went up to Horatia :—

“I say—you don't like me to call you aunt?”

Even “aunt” started! So did I—for it was a fact I knew inductively; but Philippa could have only known instinctively—she did *not* like it.

“I want to kiss you,” adds Philippa.

Horatia was not one of your universal woman-kissers; in fact, I hardly ever saw her kiss any person; her embraces were reserved for *one*, at

present. She stooped her cheek a little, however, and Philippa climbed on a stool.

"Shall I call you Miss Standish?"

Horatia laughed—what a melancholy laugh—though born of momentary mirth.

"I am *not* Miss Standish. No, certainly you may NOT call me so."

"Then may I call you 'dear'?"

"Oh, certainly, it is a very charming word."

So Philippa did ever afterwards—and as she had never chosen to give Arnold Major the name of uncle, and had always persisted in giving it *me*, I possessed it solely, and possess it to this day.

Arnold Major was quite right about Horatia's management—it was miraculous, and it proved, in one of the most trifling instances, how lost and imposed on are men without wives to care for them, not only *like* them—a vastly different thing—though in that, as in many ex-

amples, the "greater includes the less." I do think her pride may have helped her a mere *little*, where *style* was the point in question; but it never infringed on the tender forecast of her love where his comfort *only* was concerned.

Horatia found "opportunity in extremity." Of the room opposite the parlour which Arnold Major had used on the supposition that it was necessarily the *only* sitting-room—yes, of the room which had been given up to the children and their desires, she made the most exquisite drawing-room. In fact it *was* a long room, running the whole depth of the house. But Arnold Major, man-like, I myself after him also, had always under-rated it because it had a hideous-patterned, sick-hued papering. Mrs. Arnold Major "changed all that;" she re-papered it with the very simplest and tiniest moss-pattern in gold on white; for here be it

recalled, she had sold her personal effects to such purpose, that on the interest of the sum realised, she proposed to dress herself entirely. This paper was the only gift she bestowed on the house,—that is, bought for it;—for, with the residue of fair-shaped and brightly-tinted articles she had reserved, she made that long, if somewhat narrow, room lovelier than the high echoing saloon in Wilton Crescent. No wonder Arnold Major was amazed—with the sum he had spent, or half wasted, weekly, his wife not only set up, but maintained a page, besides the woman-servant (Arnold Major's own original one); the boy, a nice little creature, clean, clever, sharp as steel,—nay, a very fast “buttons” indeed, who yet adored the shadow of his mistress so devotedly that he did not even hanker after the flesh-pots of Wilton Crescent—for he had been bred there, and was the butler's first grand offspring. I know that (light

weight as he was) he "sat heavy on the soul" of Arnold Major, the whole of the first year he was there, until the end of it. And then, "Positively we are not in debt!" said my friend to me when I called on literary business of my own, and he could not help praising her to me (of course I don't know how much he covered her with laurels under the shadow of the rose). "Not only we are not in debt, but have saved something—so she says." Then came a pause filled by a sigh, which, had I not been tolerably discerning, as well as deeply interested and somewhat experienced too by this time, I should have wondered at. However, this is getting on too fast.

If ever there is romance, as well as love, in a marriage, it deepens hour by hour, like the love. In fact, the grand difficulty in delineating the life of *real* marriage (not formal and factitious, veiling hate, disregard, or unsuita-

bility) would be ever to leave off. Had one the right as well as the power to depict it, *cui bono?* for, as is the case with all the *few* interesting subjects of discourse or scripture, so very rare is the interest it excites; or perhaps rather, so few human beings can look up with marriage glory on their faces, because so few have married without some cause, remote or proximate, of shame.

In this *my* marriage there was romance enough; I believe the exceeding romance of both their dispositions saved them both from various small collisions with minute obstacles of fate, but it could not help either in the governing circumstances which impeded for a time—not too long for good—their perfect union. Were they not married then, and happy? Happy as never man or woman *can* be out of marriage: nay, their intense and vital realisation of the bliss of their *positive* existence had a tendency and close approxima-

tion to pain, because it was so keenly perfect. I have nothing to do with that, save to notice it, for had not their happiness been summer bright, the negative troubles (that impeded what I call their perfect union) would not have been excited either, any more than motes can dance in the sunbeam when the sun is under cloud.

I think Arnold Major believed that a few weeks, if not a few days, would restore her completely to him as she had been before. This was not, and could not be, because she herself was changed. Lovely as her disposition was, and noble her nature to its inmost core, she had never been tried in the manner she herself appreciated most painfully, until the instant when the terror fell on her. To call the loss of wealth a terror may sound absurd, but is really rational, because our greatest terrors are not the most absolutely and abstract terrible thing or fancy, but what we

dread the most. Then again, there is something in the quality called Taste which is little comprehended, because in this country it is scarcely ever possessed. And to a person of taste it is very *difficult*, not only disagreeable, to be poor. Again, there are persons who, without overvaluing money either as misers or spendthrifts, have a *taste* for it, which is quite as rational as one for eating olives or laver—nay, as natural as an instinct for the chase. And Horatia, had she possessed the largest fortune in the world—not the *new* world, but say the old sumptuous Roman one—would have done more good with it, and created for a greater number more enjoyment out of it, than any woman that ever lived. I say woman, not man, because women are proverbially and openly extravagant where men are secretly and slyly so. Therefore, knowing so many persons richer than herself, Horatia had never considered herself rich, though

she had been perfectly contented until the flush of pride had bloomed out of her love, pride in being able to bestow even the *credit* of a richer wife than was he a husband, on *him*. If a greater personal trouble could have befallen her (which I doubt), I fear she would have behaved exactly as she did behave, full-facing all the world, as one unconscious of having imperilled her safe position in her social niche. In *public* so, I say; and in private, turned, not restive (too womanly even for that), but shy and heart-veiled towards her husband — a little while, that must have seemed *how* long to him.

Of course, Horatia's afternoons were for ever over, abruptly cut out from the current and the future calendars? Not at all! They still *were*—and were, of course, unattended? Nothing of the kind. In fact, any man, of any age or standing, who could fancy them

made null and void, must be a greater muff than I myself (who, notwithstanding, *did* expect that no one would continue to call on her, having learned such old-fashioned and selectly narrow notions of my kind from my uncle, in the days when impressions are apt to be deep, if not ineradicable).

Horatia's afternoons were *crammed*. I went to about six of them out of curiosity, and I should have been amused, but for the face of the hostess. The struggle of her personal pride—it went no deeper, and was just as naughty—kept her erect, brilliant, desperately witty, but as calm as the frost, forging in white furnaces the myriad-moulded icicles. I fancy she was resolute to keep her intellectual ground because she had willingly surrendered her musical position; nothing would induce her to sing in the long *low* room, except to her husband;

I think she was afraid of her voice being too strong for it when it was full, as it always was! and of being laughed at, which no one likes—and she! She could sing to her husband, though, while he wrote in the room across the passage; and once or twice I was by his side, or near him; and on those occasions her voice was like the sea when

“It shakes the white pillars of the Orkneys.”

And he was like those trembling but eternal columns. His whole frame quivered, and his eyes streamed glory that the fiery strains alone preserved from dissolving into those great founts it is dangerous to break up — the tears of manhood.

“I cannot write!” he said on one of these occasions, and dashed down his pen; then grasped it hardily; with the red light fixed on his cheek, that in a face like his

is not a symptom of perfect *health*; grasped it, and gathered up his whole mental energy and will to do what none can *go on doing*—two things at once! Even I was horrified at the stress upon his countenance—his soul embracing hers, his ear drinking deep draughts of her voice, sweeter to him, and more intoxicating, than the fresh-pressed “blood of the grape;” and his brain bent, bowed from its highest exercise to an employ which microscopically engaged it, yet was of its powers totally unworthy. What strain of nature can last for ever, without reacting on the flesh? And there was more. I suppose men always take men’s parts; but I could tell, and did not wonder, that it was a fearful disappointment to him she did not slip quite easily into the consciousness of being *his own* now, to provide and labour for, as well as to worship and to tend. He had no right to have expected that she *would*,

but that he had expected it was evident. I could gather from his mere manner—nay, his mere expression—that, unfailing in the sweetness of wifely duty, she treated him rather more like a lover than a husband now; I mean she did not open, through all her deeps and heights of nature, so fully and freely to him as before the misfortune had descended. Indeed, I found out from revelations of sickness, that all-revealer, afterwards, that she had not only haughtily, if smilingly, rejected all consolation from him on the *ground* of the misfortune, but had laughed it off into pretended insignificance, and steadily forborne from further allusion to it. This of course might have been philosophy on her part, but I fear it was only pride.

She knew her place as a wife, however. Arnold Major said to me one day:—

“I cannot get her to go out, and she

must miss it. Indeed it is as necessary to her as sun to certain flowers."

"Why will she not go?" was my natural rejoinder.

"Because *I* cannot—positively it is *impossible* for me to spare the time—which is all I have; I *must* push for the next ten years, and then, perhaps, we shall both rest and have time to love." With one of his heavenly smiles.

"Do you really mean that she *requires* to go out?"

"I am certain—she is so used to it; and in such organisations habit is not only second nature, but the very child of the *first*."

"If you really *do* want her to go out, ask her as a favour and kindness to yourself, and you will see."

I was curious to see. Certainly he was right in considering that her idiosyncrasy de-

manded great freedom and space to expand in, but it had only really done her good *after* her marriage, when he had gone with her. To go alone was not only to her a fruitless trouble, but a positive nervous shock.

Still, as I had expected (I did not know how he persuaded her, but I believe he rather ordained it), she *did* resume her old fashion somewhat, for about half-a-dozen experiments,—that is to say, she went out a little, returning very early; but left off on a sudden. I don't think she told him *why*, because he did not ask her. I know I was frightened at both their faces one night just about this time, and yet the woebegone expression on both, so pale, so indrawn mutually, would have been positively sneered at by most persons, even the most poetical. For what cause did they suffer? it might have been asked then—no mist of envy

defiled their summer, nor abyss of the hell of jealousy yawned between them, yet the jealousy existed somewhere in their heaven. Ah! if it be true that the "more delicate and exquisite a flower of joy, the tenderer must be the hand that plucks it," I think the same may be said of certain flowers of sorrow—frail blossoms that will never come to fruit, yet fling their bitter perfume out awhile to fill the soul that loves with faintness, nay, with even sickening fear.

Certainly the vanishing of wealth, "taking to itself wings," into the empyrean of non-existence, can be, must be, no trifle, or it could not so bereave certain persons of more than itself.

People who have lost crowns, have borne it easier— but then they had not the sensation which beats in the very blood of the child of a noble and wealthy parent, that the gold was as though coined—or, if

not coined, conserved by *love* for the heir of all.

Howbeit, it is rare to see sincere devotion—always to be respected, if not admired and imitated,—rare especially to find it in persons of that caste, which, if it abjure not passion, as the Hindoo curses pork, yet certainly condemns the life of love as one to be avoided, unless *enormous* external advantages compensate for and cover its multitude of tender “weaknesses,” that are *never* sin.

It was Horatia’s fate to have excited and preserved such devotion. Her loss of wealth, if it was a blow to herself, a blow to love, through its twin passion, pride; was a death-blow to another. It positively killed Mrs. Le Kyteler, who seemed to have no disease before save that of worldliness, which Heaven is kindlier to, and death medicines much more gently and surely than sectarians ever dream of. Horatia’s loss fretted her old

friend to constant and vital-feeding fever, and not only her actual loss in her own person, but what she had further sacrificed through her ingenious generosity on behalf of her same old friend.

This death, very sudden, if very easy, was a dreadful shock to Horatia. I never saw her (as I have said) shed tears positively, but her husband told me then (in half-despairing confidence) that she had cried all night after she had seen her friend die, albeit in such a gentle and unsuffering end.

I saw Horatia next day. It was true that nothing could be *done* between them, yet a third person could a little beguile each of them, when apart, from the speechless brooding over the mortal troubles that are *real*, which waste the nervous energy so fatally and fast. I sounded a few fathoms of the trouble in her case this time.

"How are you?" I asked, rather condolingly—awkwardly, I dare say.

She looked white as ashes and weary with weeping: her very eyelids clear through at their edges with the fretting of the salt tears so unlike the dews, sweeter than those of morning or of evening, that distil from love alone.

But I had mistaken her if I dreamed she needed, or chose to accept, condolence. She was "perfectly well," had "never been better,"—"what had I been doing?"—"she hoped I was not going to have many deaths in my present book,"—the one I was now engaged upon—"I was too fond of killing people; would I like to see Philippa, who was growing an immense child?" I refused the honor. "Should she (Horatia) sing to me?"

Ah! I could not refuse *that*.

So she sang to me superbly, but rather too forcedly—sang about a dozen "new"

things. "Lord Wilders brought them me," she explained. "Lent them, I mean."

"He does not sing with you now?"

"No," she answered, "there is not room enough. I do not choose to ask him—I mean, let him."

"My friend must be very glad there is not room enough," I observed, out of perfect simplicity—still from a very strong impulse.

She turned round facing me.

"I do not understand you," she said in her coldest voice, still a very sincere tone indeed. As for me, I am born to have to do with secret things, though I do not tamper with them, I fancy. And when with a person noble-natured all through, I fear not my own audacity.

"Don't be angry with me, Mrs. Major. I only mean that if I had a wife who sang as you sing, I should not

be *jealous* if she sang with another man, (though I fear I should envy the fellow his voice), but I should simply be very glad if any chance circumstance interfered with, or stopped, their singing together. Breaths mingle in singing when so near—and such music is apt to upset a weak-headed, but excitable man, while it takes no effect on a woman whose temperament is unexcitable, save under the influence of *one*—that one her husband.”

“Gracious! Do you know what you are saying, and do you mean it?”

“Truly and honestly. If you were not altogether a woman, you would comprehend my prejudice, and even share it.”

“I can only say that you would make a desirable husband for the most jealous woman living—which I am not. Do you wish for any further entertainment, or shall I shut the piano? There is a factory of some kind

near, and the blacks are fond of settling on the keys."

"Only one thing more—not a 'new thing.' Do 'say' me 'In questa tomba oscura,' as you pretend to *saying* songs rather than singing them."

This was a fact, a little affectation of hers!

She sang it; and made me (though I am not superstitious) shake to my heart's centre with the loving fear, the awful love of death.

As she finished and was dreamily dispersing the symphony from her fiery finger-ends, she said abruptly:—

"But my husband disapproves of nothing I do, Mr. Loftus; if he did, he would tell me immediately and I should alter it. One advantage men have over women (proper to their sex of course) is that they *may* disapprove of anything in their wives they please, and express it openly, without compromising either their conjugal kindness or their—"

"Pride," for she hesitated. I went on :

"Do you mean a wife cannot object to whatever she chooses in a husband's conduct *out* of his conjugality?"

"How *could* you guess what I meant?" she asked, evidently amazed.

"You gave me to understand just so much as that you were anxious, and did not choose to express it openly to him, not that I think you right. But yet I would fain relieve your anxiety if I could."

I saw her give me a stealthy side-glance—she was jealous herself of *something*, and very desirous to be sure I did not suspect her of anything beyond anxiety. I bore the scrutiny unflinchingly; I never change colour, save to grow paler, in any extremity, and this was not yet one, thank God!

"Don't you think he looks different the last month — *awfully tired* and thin? pray tell me as a stranger — I mean friend — at

least as one who does not see him *constantly*."

"I saw him yesterday, and then I had not seen him for a week. I saw no difference since the time before. *Is* he ill? I only know he looks desperately happy, and as I have seen him look desperately unhappy, I am so far a judge."

She smiled exceedingly—she liked to hear that—but still held her peace.

"But you surely don't reflect upon the fact that, loving you as he does, and as I believe no man living loves besides, he cannot help being sad to see you suffer, even from a trifling cause."

"A trifling cause!"

"Is not a loss like yours a trifling cause for wasting and wearing grief? I don't mean your *new* loss—your late one I mean, which you don't seem to recover. Now *I* was very unhappy to lose what I expected, but

it was because I found my uncle had loved me little and misunderstood me quite,—I did not like being poor, but now I have ceased to care about it—am even glad to be, since it has given me what I should never have attained without.”

“So you have taken upon you to lecture me, but your—premises are wrong. I had forgotten all about what you term “my loss”—and was reflecting on something of much more consequence. I should not tell you, if I did not think you might help me in it. I cannot know what my husband does, but I *know* he is working too hard, and that presently he will be ill if it goes on. I have no right to enquire of *him*, as he had not given me so much as a hint. And certainly,—now I think seriously—I ought not to have mentioned it to you—even. So do not say one word about it. Men have of course the right to kill them-

selves if they choose, and if it is not against their principles to commit suicide."

I could not quite make out her mood—she bewildered me. Rather, I was puzzled by its duality, for ever and anon, through her paleness, and from her eyes dull with tears, like a cloudy sky whose rain has ceased, beamed an expression of uncontrollable and insatiable pleasure, a doting look as of a heart dreamy with drinking too deeply of its own delight—a look I had never seen on her face or any other, for it was the first time I beheld the beauty of that fairest mystery—maternity revealed.

Well, it baffled me even more than the sadness, and both the grief and bliss were inexplicable in their intensity. I was not going to betray her, and yet I was resolved to discover the cause of her fresh anxiety (that was *not* jealousy). I recollected the tale of the man who was made ill by a

certain number of his friends agreeing to meet him in different places and tell him one and all that he *looked* ill, and I was cautious. Horatia and her husband were worthy of each other for innocence (that not being ignorance), and the very next day he came to me, pale as she had looked the day before, but radiant—too bright and blissfully at ease for smiles: soft rather, and earnest;—earnest as love and death. Short time as it was since her marriage, yet even before her mercenary bereavement, Horatia had worried herself, as only such *true* women worry, at her want of promise to become a mother; nay, I myself heard her, before she had been a wife a year, declare she was certain she should never have a “baby.” Her tenderness for children was indeed a passion most peculiar and innate; not created nor even *formed* by wifely love.

CHAPTER VI.

BITTERNESS.

HOWEVER, the sweetest bliss that bears the "brand of sorrow" was hers at last. I could scarce find it in my heart to question him on any other subject; yet felt as though it were a kind of duty to do so. I did not really think he looked ill, so I pretended to think it.

"What *have* you been doing to yourself?" I said; "you are overworking, beyond the

mark, and it will never do." He started.

"What do you mean? Has she said anything?"

Certainly she had, but at that precise moment I did not choose to say so: I rather waited, restrained by respect even for such shadowy confidence as hers, which, betrayed to her husband by another man, might make a misunderstanding which had, not shadowy, but vital consequences.

"You look ill—very fagged and worn:—is there anything I could do?"

At the least touch of humanity his heart always vibrated; he was so human where even most unlike the human average.

"You are very kind, you always are. No, I have not at all too much to do, but I am thankful to say more than I had, which was most insufficient."

"Are the Browns going to scrape together the ashes of the Alexandrian from under

their ages' accumulated dust-heap? Perhaps (like *peat*, in the case of human bodies), such refuse has not only covered, but *preserved* them!"

"Ah! I don't mind how much you laugh at me; I am too happy and thankful to Heaven, and to my darling, darling wife!"

His gratitude knew no limits; his noble nature recoiled not from the full confession of its gladness—where it was fully understood. Only I was anxious in the recollection of her anxiety.

"How then about having more to do than you had?—and *that* much having been 'insufficient?'"

"Only that they are going to superannuate their accountant, and, of course, pension him, and that I am trying for the situation, and hope to succeed."

I stifled my desire to exclaim in any interjection which might divert this rare

confidence of his. I could have groaned though. If there was anything not only uncongenial to, but improper for him, it was figures. I don't speak with any nauseous, nonsensical notion that anything is improper to do which (being pure in itself) is *possible*. But before I could keep books myself I should be in a strait-waistcoat, though I were to try with all my might. And he!—how much less fit than I!—particularly because his general and chief occupation was trying to him in the extreme, and it induced constant mental tension, whereas *my* chief occupation was to me congenial.

“But may I ask—does the ‘game seem worth the candle?’—I mean, forgive me, do they pay enough to make the labour “worth the love?”

“Oh ! if I can only get it, it is two hundred a-year, you know.”

If he only got it! I looked at him a

moment, in his *manhood*, so glorious in its *purity* and strength, his intellect so masterly that disdained no duty, how inferior soever to its power; his *knowledge*, that could (had it been matched in him with equal cunning, avarice, or worldliness) have compassed any political place in the broad road of power. Yes, it was better thus—he lost nothing, save a few paltry fragments from hands that reeked with the hard-wrung sweat of universal injustice.

“I am sure you *will* get it,” (I couldn’t say anything else). “But can’t I help you the least?—I think I could.”

“No, no,—I’m not ungrateful; but see, Ernest, would it not be strangely *dwarfing* to learn one’s Latin *accidence* or premier Greek grammar *now*? *I*, for one, have absolutely forgotten mine! It is merely creeping on one’s hands and knees a little, however, to get up the equally forgotten figures, and it

does *me* no harm, but *you* have wings, and it would be impossible in your case. Oh! how I should lie down in blissful consciousness that I deserved it!" he added, spreading wide his arms with that peculiar gesture of his I had always remarked, though seldom seen—a kind of stretching towards the infinite, most when most human.

"But surely it is not so difficult," said I, "and when is it to be decided?"

"Presently—in one month, I hope; but they have many candidates already."

"Heavens! And they would dream of another, when you were on the list?"

"Of course; they consider me the least eligible, that is natural, for I am," quite calmly I went on.

"Ah! And you have to try your paces in the evening, I suppose?"

"Yes—and that is hardest—is it not hard? I don't mind saying so to you. It takes

me from her, and it *must*. She does not know why, and I cannot tell her. She never would believe it is entirely for our baby—as it is.”

Strange revelations; but how sweet is nature, shining through the truth!

“Ah! you think she would imagine it was for *her*—for her only you toiled extra, and would fret and beat her wings against such ‘walls of fate.’”

“Of course she would! She has behaved so generously, and has given me such cause, beyond even my desert in *loving her* (I don’t think either that is small), to trust her, that I dare not tell her I am trying to make more money—she would be certain (nothing could unconvince her) that it was on her own account. And it is not—she needs so little—takes so little for herself, and is so wonderfully content in her fresh, unexpected trust *in me alone*; that—not only

I cannot thank her for *that*, but I cannot tell her the other."

His face belied his words, as to the certainty that she *liked* the sole trust in him (albeit, it was all the more generous if she liked it *not*).

"*Why* can't you tell her?" I asked abruptly, though I fancy it was a natural question.

"Because you forget—she has lost so much that she herself would have given to *her* child! Ernest, I have never confided so far in any mortal creature as now in you—I don't mean anything I should confide to *her*—though I should tell her all, were it the time to do so. She would suffer more than needful if she knew I worked to remedy her child's loss in *hers*—*worked* she would, of course, term it, for she has no idea of the slightness of the occupation, albeit it takes *time*."

“How long?—You are two hours later every evening, I suppose?”

“Oh, no, not more than one—scarcely an hour later. I could not bear more myself, and I think she could not.”

I thought, moreover, that her pride compelled her to hide from him how much she suffered in the *one hour's* defection,—nay, I was sure of it. Very wrong, of course,—still, perhaps, pardonable. I also knew it would be useless to try and persuade him to tell her his secret; for, not to name him by so harsh a term as obstinate, he was immutable in his least resolve when taken.

The eyes of love strike deeper than those of knowledge, and see, how infinitely further!—the eyes of a wife's love are infallible. She knew him better and his future, where I saw no evil, nor dreamed the dimmest shadow of impending woe.

After our little lonely conversation, Horatia rather avoided me, never asked nor permitted me to see her alone; nay, I fancy she detected that I had not strictly obeyed her injunctions "not to say one word about it," and it was just like her *not* to question me as to the results of my intermeddling. As for him, he obtained the accountantship. Of course they were glad enough to get him, and rather ashamed to pay him so little; though slightly helped out of their confusion by the certainty he would tell no one *how* much (or how little) it actually was, except me (for whom they had no reverence at all) and his wife, their respect for whom had been founded upon her fortune solely.

If I saw thus little of her at this time, I saw less of him; but I understood that perfectly. He could not have time to call on me. At last there was a gap of full three months between one of his flying visits and the next.

Various remittances had meantime reached me, on the boy's account, through the post—sent from the city of course. I was just then writing very desperately, and Hilary occupied all my leisure. As for him, I never could persuade him to take little messages to, or make enquiries at, his uncle's house, and indeed the only moments he saw Philippa were when they met out of doors, as happened now and then.

It was about ten o'clock that day—how well I recollect it! Hilary had just fetched out his books and put them on his own little table in the window. I was at my writing-desk, answering a mysterious note dictated by John—he was always dictating mysterious little notes to me now—I could never imagine why, unless it was because we were now in the third year after my uncle's death. John's amanuensis was not great at spelling, and I was puzzling over a long word, when a knock at

the street-door thrilled through my very marrow, a curious phrase, perhaps, but anyone who has heard a trembling hand (not trembling with emotion, but pain or illness) raise a knocker loosely hung, will understand me—a low, uncertain, ominous vibration. I looked up and waited, and the short moments seemed very long. As I had expected to see him, knowing his knock perfectly by heart, I was not surprised when Arnold Major entered, but shocked inexpressibly, for he reeled rather than walked, with that ghost of an expression, vague, blank, yet passionately sad, which is only seen in illness, but only seen in illness on certain faces.

He threw himself on the sofa, and could not speak to me at first. I took Hilary very gently, but firmly, by his shoulders, put him out of the room, and locked the door. Whether he would listen or not, I could not tell; but it did not signify, he must be got rid of just then.

I went back to my friend. He smiled—tried to smile—a wan and wasted phantom of *his* smile, indeed.

“I believe in you—you will see,” he said,—“I want you to go out for me, this one day, and let me stay here quietly. I shall then be all right, and she will know nothing.”

One day of repose to repair such ravages! And she—surely she must have seen them. It was but the beginning, too, I knew that; my heart sank in me, as hearts *will* sink sometimes.

“I would go to a doctor,” he continued, “but I have no confidence in any. I never was positively *ill* in my life. Besides, this is not illness.”

“What then?” for he hesitated.

“Only fatigue, I think. I cannot *know*, of course; it may, of *course*, be death! But I have not slept for such nights and nights, and now have tried *everything*.”

“*Thoughts* of her made you sleep once, I recollect, before you had her too, when you two were far apart.”

I wanted to touch him deeply, to quench the still fires within his tearless eyes, that perchance they might bedew the burning brain with their refreshing waters. It was of no use, his cheek only glowed more desperately; his glance seemed devoured and dried up by the drought that preyed on his whole frame.

“You really mean that you have never told your wife!—that she does not know, nor guess about these nights—she so vigilant and tender! I cannot comprehend it.”

“I *could* not find it in my heart, for then I must have explained the *cause*. And she looks so ill herself; I fear it is the bond between us makes her reflect my *misery*. She is—I cannot say—I must not speak of her. No! just tell me, *can* you go for me, or not?”

“I will go, *certainly*, this moment,” and

so I did, though he knew not whither. As for Brown, Jones, and Co., they might have been blown up by a powder-train laid privily in the cellars, or carried across the Atlantic bodily, and left on the Andes, for all I thought or cared about them in that hour.

I went straight to her. She came down to me from her room; she was changed, but not as *he*. She was pale to her lips, with the passion of bitterly suppressed suspense. I would not lengthen it an instant, nor would I frighten her, I thought.

She did not hold out her hand, but stood, white-faced, wavering-footed, before me, a good way off.

"I don't think your husband is very well; he wants perfect rest, and I think, if you were with him, he would procure it.—No worse; nothing to *see*—except such dead fatigue, and that will be mended by repose, you know. He has taken none so long."

Such wild wandering glances round the room ! I went a few steps towards her, for I feared she would fall. Still dry were her eyes as his. Had she caught the infection of that tearless fever ?

Still she said nothing, but sat down in a chair. Such perfect anguish of despair I never beheld ; it could not happen twice, no, not in the hour of death's short, but *real* separation. That she had given him up already I was sure.

"I must tell you that he came to *me* and told *me*, because he wanted to spare *you*, whom he loves perhaps too well for his own peace. I will further tell you that there is good cause for all this : he has been overworking, just that he might get two hundred a-year more, you can tell for whom ! and his brain won't stand figures. All beings delicately, if finely, organised must have such a crisis once."

She got up abruptly—turned coldly from me to the table.

“Don’t talk,” said she, “wait for me;” she wrote two notes with a hand that shivered to the very sight, tossed them over the table to me, “Please direct them, I can’t clearly.”

She then dictated to me the names of the court physician and chief surgeon. I did not like that, but let it pass that moment. She rang the bell, and when the boy came, made a sign to me, she could not then speak. I ordered him to carry the notes instantly; then I wrote a telegraphic message (she eyed me wistfully an instant when I began, but left the room before I had ended, and came down in a minute with her bonnet on.

“It is a long way,” she said, with a sigh *too* deep.

“A little way indeed, only round the corner.”

“He came to *you* then, actually to *you* first! Oh, what have I done to deserve it? yet I do deserve it, I know! I know!”

She sat down and sobbed violently, hysterically, still without a tear.

“You scarcely deserve his love, if you cannot understand it,” I said. I actually felt angry for the moment, for I had *seen* him in his extremity, which had in fact been too sudden (as are all shocks after long preparation) for her to *define* and perceive, whatever she might have dreamed or dreaded.

Her agitation became awful, because so helpless for the time, and *she* so humiliated—it seemed strange indeed.

“I know I do not deserve his love, I never did, I always knew it. I ought to have flung myself under his feet and stayed there till he told me all; I ought to have thrown my hands round him and held him fast every day, kept him at home by

hanging to his neck like a millstone; I ought to have made him weary of me and wish me dead!"

Her whole frame was as if in a convulsion. I gave her some water, she could not swallow it. I tried one of the oldest fashioned and best recipes with women—for example:—

"You must think of your child, or you will hurt it, and that would break his heart."

"Oh, it is safe enough, no fear! what is it to me in comparison with him? It does not exist—or it lives where nothing can harm it—out of the life *he* has filled."

It roused her though—she got up and went downstairs before me. We drove quickly, silently.

"Shall I go in first and tell him?" was my question.

"Certainly not." She went in alone, I dared not follow then, but went straight to

the nearest telegraph office, having written for Lord Lyndfield on my own responsibility.

Why did I write for *him*? I cannot say, except that when an impulse strikes through me *directly, piercingly*, I always obey it, for I never find it wrong in its result. Had I been ill myself, I should never have consulted anyone else, but I had no guarantee, not even any intuition, that he would understand all constitutions as he had done mine. I had not heard from him for quite six months, though I knew he was alive, for I had heard very lately from some one else; she and I always wrote to each other once a month.

I went straight back to my rooms, and found them already void of Horatia and her husband. There, however, sat Philippa on the rug, dressing her cat in a black silk cravat of mine, and her own black silk apron.

"What *are* you doing, child?" I asked.

Surely there are sand-grains of comedy in the base of the floods of grief.

"'*Dear*' is very miserable. I should not be, if he was my husband, I should be glad. Is he going to die?"

Rather awe-struck the last words.

"If he is, you and I had better pray to be as good as he is, before our time comes, as it *will*—"

She tore the black rags off.

"I didn't mean anything; but I can't be so fond of kissing as *she* is, nor ever shall be, not if I married *you*, uncle; and I don't like kissing *him* at all."

Hilary—curious child—was sitting in the window, pale and grave—unlike himself; as the girl spoke, he came to me and said:—

"I hope he is not going to die, because I have behaved badly to him, and it would stop near me all my life."

Strange power of the celestial gift men call conscience—where it is *unsullied* and unseared.

“You may make some muffins,” said I to Philippa, “for I am going out.”

This to divert her from her mournful play. Making muffins was to cut out small rounds of bread with a thimble and toast them on a darning-needle. It was Philippa’s favourite game, and I had the credit of inventing it. I borrowed the feminine implements from my landlady and placed them on the table, with all due appliances of bread, &c., but, as I was shutting the door, I chanced to look back and see Philippa moistening the future muffins with her (unfrequent) tears.

How I yearned to go and see, or hear, what was happening—had happened in this short time. But I feared for the future, if there should be a mortal future, and that too much (if how little) would be lost, were

no explanation offered at the house of business. So there I went directly—first.

Business knows neither sickness, sorrow, passion, love, suspense, nor—death. Everything was going on straightforwardly, but everything was dull. The handsome partner was very much disgusted at any reader daring to be ill, and very nearly told me so—I saw him first—the unattractive senior was “very sorry,” he said (he didn’t look so), but my whole trust was in the partner who had furthered the advance of Arnold Major *lately*, and who had a heart of flesh *inside* his heart of gold—he was very rich, and petted by the firm accordingly; of good family, and feared by them in proportion. A very few words sufficed to establish me in Arnold Major’s room “until he should have recovered—” vague term, dimly veiling the possible fact of something other than recovery. And this partner procured me respite from

attendance the rest of that day—a kindly favour which made me fancy he too, perhaps, had lost—a friend.

It was well he gave me even that short leave of absence. Horatia's passionate anxiety and helpless lovingness might have done some harm, or prevented some good, in the case of her beloved patient.

She had been nearly doctored to death herself more than once, and yet in her optimism, not to say charity—(the optimism I have already taxed her with)—she could not believe that any physician and surgeon of high-sounding repute and vast practice—large fortune too—could err, at least be at fault, if not downright ignorant.

They were both by his side, his bedside—I found—could not even name the attack in plain English, and diametrically differed as to treatment, but that the case was emergent they both knew, and looked

(to me) inwardly appalled at their own fallibility.

The physician prescribed opiates, the surgeon depletion. Of course I got Horatia out of the room for a minute—it was like wrenching a limpet from the rock, even for that minute.

“You *must* attend to me, and not look wild,” I said.

“I can’t help looking wild,” she said, touchingly; “it does not make me deaf. I can listen,—now, directly.”

“If you allow them to put on leeches, he will *die*. Die for want of the life that is in the blood—it is so little, and all he has left. His pulse is almost indetectible, though so rapid; his veins are almost empty. Besides, I heard him say once, when he was ill with excitement, that a French surgeon ordered him never to be bled.”

“That is enough; if he said so himself,

it shall not be done, whatever happens. Tell me then—advise me.”

“Take the prescription from the other, and give the patient *half*. That is my intuition, and I should follow it blindly. I have written for some one in whom I have faith when I can trust at all.”

I gave her a glass of wine, not into her hand, for she could not have held it, but put it to her lips and she swallowed it like a child—then flew back into his room. I waited in the drawing-room, heard one of the arbiters of health descend, and then the other. Both carriages rolled away.

There was no going out for the remedies ; Horatia was never without a medicine-chest, and the prescriber had mixed them himself. So I waited. Then my pulses began to spin with the hastening of the crisis of suspense. Lord Lyndfield might arrive within an hour.

An hour, and no mortal coming,—no voice in the strange house, which sickness, the sickness of the “just,” makes solemn beyond all temples. Half an hour, and now my pulses tolled in my ears. Then seemed to leap up before my own a vision like a tongue of light, for Horatia opened the door; spirit-quiet, awful-looking, she fled to me.

“Come!” she said, and not another word. That word was crushing. It made me blind with tears a moment, but her eyes were dry as dust. She was right in her instinct, though, when she told me her child was safe. It *was* safe, *isolated* in its own soft paradise of love, amidst the great deep of conjugal passion that was now torn up with tempest.

I thanked God that through my own exceeding ignorance, *my* instinct too had pierced with one ray of the truth. Well for him, for her, and for me, that she had only given

him half the overpoweringly strong dose of opium and other narcotic trifles, such as aconite and henbane, with a dash of *hydrarg.*, a squeeze of lettuce, &c. Had he retained the whole, he would have been *poisoned*, drugged to stupor—the stupor next to death—which *must* have followed it.

Healthy as he was in every vein, the purity of a virtuous and temperate life could be no match for the violent means that are for the extreme of disease, whether inherited or from intemperance acquired. And his intensely reserved sufferings, trodden down and dormant in his former lonely life, would have (as nature will) reaction in the very freedom of perfect life and happiness.

Therefore, much of his strength had been spent of late in very bliss—how much more of his vital energy in occupation that had worn his nerves, and strained *their* strong and subtle powers beyond the lawful mark. Then, too,

there *had* been a misunderstanding between them, delicate, unspoken, but how little of that bitter leaven leavens perfect love!—*spousal* love—none other.

She had called me only, because she could not hold him down. He was wildly delirious—as such a brain will be in the grasp of opium. A light dose might have acted differently—I do not know—on a brain wholly balanced and active, with not (naturally) the slightest morbid tendency.

In his case there was no heaviness nor indolence of temperament to keep furled the “wings of thought.”

His palms burned as though each were red-hot; his eyes were each a living blaze that saw no *human* sight; yet his brow was bloodless white, and not a vein stood out above the surface.

I flung both my arms across the sheet which alone covered the bed, and made of them an

arch: she sitting on the bed, beside the pillow, held one arm under his head, and never left her hold; but with the other hand she grasped (rather than veiled) her eyes. I did not wonder. I believe she was, even in that extremity, thankful I was with her, and no other man or woman to hear his muttered passion—the “real man” outspeaking in the hour when art and pride lie low.

I had known all along he was jealous, but had deemed him so within the bounds of right and justice belonging to a husband. Now, the human weakness—woe to us all, we all share it in the flesh!—burst from the living grave built over it so carefully by art and pride. He raved—not loud, but in his own strong tones, sharpened and rarefied till they pierced the ear—raved of secrets sweet as love, made sad by his suspicions, of mysteries half divine in their very human excellence, darkened nearly to despair by selfish and all-exigent idolatry.

Not a man Horatia had sung with, or conversed with, or been acquainted with, or had amused, since, nay before, her marriage, but was recalled and condemned, in language wild indeed, but which seemed to shiver through her being with some marrow-piercing arrow of conviction, invisible to me that hour, perchance winged from the visible abyss of truth for *her*.

Then the agony of remorse that clutched him (conscience *seeing* in the dark), because he had withheld one little secret from her! It was a lesson certainly in the duties of love, whether towards God or one's fellow-creature.

Still awake—so awfully awake—too vivid an awakening of every power, faculty, conception, instinct—no rest in any nerve, through any organ; but all in anarchy, and the lord of all discrowned and clothed with weakness. It could not last, and mysterious as the struggle was, a greater mystery must end it.

And now—strange words—more strange than any, prompted by such thoughts as made light-headed saints, in darker times, call them temptations of another than the self in every man! He believed himself dying in that waking dream; cast glances on her that might have struck her to the ground like lightning—spoke of her forgetting him and being another's wife! He had forgotten all about his child.

I heard steps outside the door. She had crept to the bottom of the bed now, and hidden her face above his feet. I drew her away rather roughly. Alas! there was no time for gentleness.

“Kiss him,” I said, “stop his lips! some one is coming and will hear.”

She threw her face on his, gently enough, too gently; she pressed his head against her bosom—so held it—buried it; the wild words passed into her heart and only there.

I knew something was at hand—a sort of wild hope, fresh as the cold breeze before the rising sun after a whole night's fever, swept my spirit—seemed to sweep my very brow. I opened the door. There stood, and entered, my first friend.

How wonderful is Life ! A doctor, to be one truly, should be pure of all disease ; should radiate health, I think ; or, if I be in error, I felt it so that hour. “A healthy mind in a healthy body” expresses exactly the temperament and condition of Lord Lyndfield. It always struck me as the highest proof of his knowledge and sympathy, that he could penetrate and feel for, even medicine, torments he could not *understand*.

He went to the bed—the benign breath of healing seemed to float round his aspect. I felt superstitious ; I fancied for the instant his very *touch* would cure. Alas ! *she* knew better, for she *searched* his face with her

despairing eyes, and when *I* saw his own—I saw he had no power—and knew it.

“The chief symptom?” he asked me in a whisper; “is there *another* symptom I do not see?”

“No sleep,” said I, “for eleven nights, nor in the day. They gave him this—” and I handed him the paper. He scarce looked at it—threw it noiselessly on the table behind the curtain.

“No time for delay or ceremony,” he whispered still, “I have but one chance; but if *you* choose, you can lose me that. You must leave the room.”

I had no heart to marvel; besides, he followed me.

“Miss Hope is here; she has saved more *brains* than I. But if she sees you, I will not answer for her skill. I suspected something of this sort, and brought her. Sleep he must, or die—and not many hours off.”

“She shall not see me.”

Who can answer for himself in human extremity when it is *one's own*? That moment I could scarcely grieve for; could barely recollect—the sick, perhaps the dying, to see her!—for that I must, saw she me or not.

Lord Lyndfield passed me, and went downstairs. He did not see me creep back into the bed-room, but I did, and hid myself entirely behind the heavy chintz folds of the curtain that drooped along the bed on the side opposite Horatia, where yet she sat—and looked half-dying, too—as calm as death.

His eyes had fixed themselves suddenly on the high canopy; she could not follow them. I knew she thought they would not stir again; but again the new hope fluttered at my heart, —I thought they would, I knew not how.

The curtain was double, and there was a slight chink between its two divisions; through it I saw all.

There was not a sound of footsteps as Erselie glided in. She had altered, I knew not how, though I knew her again too well. Even in that hour her aspect smote Horatia through and through; an eager terror, vague as death, and as awful, filled the wife's face; she looked wild as a mother whose only babe a stranger seeks to snatch from her breast—more closely she bowed to him, still with her arm under his head, but her eyes, dilated with dread, and brimmed with jealous tenderness, could not or would not cease from gazing full at the other woman—devouring her very looks, it seemed not lovingly.

And Erselie, whose yearning goodness absorbed her pride, only looked with compassion, with supplication, with *humility*, at Horatia, who did not relent. I forgave her though, for I was to the full as ignorant of what my darling *willed* as she. And, oh! how surprised at this new crotchet that had made

its nest in Lord Lyndfield's healthy brain.

Erselie only appealed by her looks a single instant to the tortured wife, and while she looked, she stood exactly at the bottom of the bed. Still poor Arnold Major lay, with those unseeing, upturned eyes; then Erselie crept round close to Horatia, and even touched her dress, which in that very hour Horatia had thought (or woman's instinct) enough to pluck from contact with her. But Erselie took no notice—only a heavenly sadness, soft and pale as moonlight, but nothing *like* it, overspread her noble face. Then she bent over him, and looked close into his eyes: looked steadfastly. I could not see hers, only the lovely lids on which peace seemed to pillow passion, and the lashes, like the shadows of an angel's wings resting dark upon the vault of night.

His eyes fell from their fearsome stare

instantly, by her mysterious power, or at her pure volition, I knew not which. They met hers—a dim ray, like *recognition in despair*, seemed radiating from that vague distressful glance. She raised her right hand—that hand whose fingers seemed alive with spirit, and in whose veins light seemed to dance and thrill instead of blood. Well I knew her hand, but I did *not* know this gesture. As she lifted it, she bent the fingers towards him slowly. That moment, that very instant, he gave a thrilling scream, and tossed over, like a poor weak weed on a tremendous billow, towards Horatia's breast, and woman, wife-like, *she* was no spirit in that hour, nor angel either. Haughtily, and cold as death, with her arms, her bosom spread over and covering *him*, she surveyed the little dark-haired thing with starry eyes, and brow a seraph might have carried in the seventh depth of heaven.

“How dare you hurt him?” said poor

Horatia, low-voiced enough. She took care her tones should not so disturb him.

In desperation, I looked towards the door. Lord Lyndfield was not there—not coming. Where was he?—should we all be lost?

“I wanted to make him *sleep*,” said Erselie, in those wonderful tones of hers, so very innocent, so infinitely earnest. “I have made so many worse than he; and you will not let me, because you love him so.”

“You cannot make him sleep,” said Horatia, restlessly, “only God can,” still covering him with her arms and speaking very low.

“There is something wrong besides; *some one else here*. I *must* be alone with him. Oh, let me!” said my darling, with anguish, with aspiration.

The sick man heard—or *felt* it—he turned half round, though he could not

escape Horatia's arms, with such heart-melting moans ! It was enough—wretch that I had been to hide myself; the other *knew me there.*

I had never heard this gift of hers spoken of; she was little likely to speak of any good she did—the greater the less likely. I understood it though; I was not ignorant of natural miracles, though my faith had been long time weak. I passed out of my corner, went behind Erselie, and so straight to Horatia—drew her by main force away from him—she struggled as if for life;—took her almost in my arms !

“If you make a sound, it may *kill* him,” I whispered. Exhausted by her long suspense and sudden-stricken pride, she had no strength left to resist me, and she was never very strong—always a *woman* in very weakness as well as love ! She

couldn't walk now, and I quite carried her downstairs. There sat Lord Lyndfield—no, he did not *sit*, he was standing bolt-upright, like a sentinel on duty. I was glad to see him there, because, before a second man besides myself, I knew Horatia would (outwardly if not physically) rally. I just laid her on the sofa, and went up to him—began talking to him as though she were not in the room.

“I don't understand animal magnetism, spiritualism, affinities, nor any jargon—no more does *she*,” said Lord Lyndfield, not noticing Horatia; he had the wisdom to do, or rather *not* to do, that. “But it is *wonderful*,” he went on gravely. “You know my chief patients, and what a lot they are; she goes among them like Daniel into the lion's den—with much such results. She isn't afraid; and yet—that can't be the whole reason!”

I knew Horatia was listening, though she made no sign.

"How did she find it out in herself?" I ventured.

"Like all grand discoveries (as they say), by chance. She met one of my poor fellows, who had torn a hole in the brick-work with his hands and nails, and climbed over my wall into *her* garden (it happened, of course, when I was absent,—I had gone to see a sick friend). He was running at her with a great knife in his hand (the knife he had secreted at a meal—I was not there, you see). She told me she felt a strange power pass into her or come over her—she didn't know whether she stood still or went forward, but she looked at him. "I looked *into* him," she said, "and I felt as if I saw his soul." He not only quailed, you know, as they *all* will under a *steady* sane eye, but fell on


the gravel-walk. Still she looked—she was a little bit afraid of his stirring—and presently a gardener came by. She called him to come and look. They looked together—behold! the patient was asleep!”

“After that, she felt a strong desire to affect others. She read no nonsense—talked no trash to other women—but *practised*. There seems absolutely no art in the case, though there must be a born gift—as that of surgery.”

He half-winked at me; he had taken my cue, and was trying to amuse Horatia. *She* was still attending, and sitting up too, now. On a sudden she stood up—came with her peculiar step towards us, and in a tone half-haughty, but also half-repentant,—

“Why choose *women*?” she inquired of him, not me—she did not look at me.

“*We* don’t choose them—Heaven does, or whatever *does* choose human beings their part in life.”



“Will she—save him?”

How clear that voice, how heart-piercing! Its calm had passed all hope, I thought.

“If she makes him sleep, most probably she will.”

“*I could not make him sleep.*”

How wearily; her very wildness was worn out. Oh, woman, woman! why not be content with wifehood, with the perfect worship of him you perfectly obey? Why not? Because she is immortal, and we all aspire who love, whether love be hidden or revealed.

Then over her face fell, pallid-dark, that shadow of wretchedness, that mock phantom of degradation, seeming *real*, which arises to haunt the good when they have failed in love's least duty, or failed to fulfil its irrefragable laws in the very lightest particular. I could see she was wrestling with this dim trouble as an enemy, and that she had not strength to *lay* it. I should never have hinted such a fact to Lord

Lynfield (he was not a man ever to comprehend or to appreciate a being like Horatia), but I got him out of the room by a little management, and put him into the other with a box of cigars, a bottle of sherry, and the "Illustrated London News."

If her husband's delirious complaints were sacred and are sealed from repetition,—far more must be the wife's. Sufficient to say that, to my knowledge, and in my presence, she drained the very dregs of her own pride, and touched in her bitterness the edge of death—its sword ran keen along her spirit, like a naked dagger pointed to the flesh—its cold but divine temper searched her through and through, and she must have been healthy and sound of mind and soul, or such a probing had surely drawn some poison from the wound. It did not—but oh, the bitterness!—her own bitterness all poured forth on *herself*. Such self-accusations!—she so loyal and passionate a wife—such turning the

blunted arrows of self-suspicion against her own soft nature. I believe in that extremity, and long, long afterwards, she took to herself all the credit of his illness—or rather, all the blame. And I believe that for every particle of attention or of time she had bestowed on other men, she expected to lose in retribution whole *ages* of *his* presence in eternity. The questions she asked me—wandering and desperate—the strange terrors she conjured up,—I could not answer her, for unnaturally exaggerated and embittered as was the truth they held or hinted at, it was still truth's essence, dissolved in overflowing draughts of woe.

And bitterest of all was the fresh-steeped wormwood of her jealousy—her jealousy that another woman served him—was with him in her absence and her powerlessness. This jealousy she tried to hide from me, a man, but it enveloped her as a garment—her face

lost all its sweetness—her very figure seemed altered—strained, as on a rack, out of its form; her eyes looked blind.

Still her whole *body* listened for the slightest sound upstairs.

To me it felt two hours; to her I doubt not like a dragging, darkest night. In reality (I knew afterwards) we were not a full hour together so.

There had been no warning rustle, no footfall, no creaking door or stair. The door opened as in a dream, and noiselessly, swiftly, Erselie entered on a sudden. Not like a spirit! a woman, from the finest tress of all her silken head down to the tender feet that trod the “path of sorrow” as softly as if on flowers. No fancied halo encircled her; she fancied none herself; her glory was the consciousness that, in sacrificing her happiness to *Right*, she had not need to sacrifice one gift, *except* that power to make

another's joy; she marred not, nor mortified, the flesh such a soul made pure.

Her cheeks, so clearly pale before, were touched as with a rose reflex, from the blood that the intensity of volition had driven too swiftly through her brain: her eyes were brimmed with a lustre as intense, —pale, yet vivid, like a lovely comet; a radiance that shook over the dark pupils a silvery veil from the bright iris; such eyes one sees not often, such glory saw I never. Unconscious of her fair and startling aspect, she passed me by; but I *felt* her *feel* me as she passed. Straight up to Horatia she went, and took her hand; that hand more than ever helpless, and more than ever fair.

“He sleeps,” said Erselie; then knelt down by the sofa, put her head on her two hands (withdrawn now *both* from the other woman's), and broke out weeping. Horatia

looked at me in white despair—despair that she had been told no more. I called on Heaven to sustain me, and went to my beloved.

“She is anxious. May she see him? go to him?”

“How selfish of me!” said Erselie, rising with her sweet eyes clouded of their glory, and turning her wet face to Horatia. “But I was so glad. Never have I tried so much. Because he is your husband; and oh, if I had a husband and he was sick, I should not be able to help him, because I should love him too much—like you!”

Poor Horatia! The “broken heart and contrite spirit;” but still the pride was there, and the jealousy, though put away and hidden, for gratitude, for very *shame*.

CHAPTER VII.

WILL WITHIN WILLS.

A WOMAN was the only companion for a wife in that hour; a wife who might not even watch her husband sleeping; for Erselie was firm as rock, and told Horatia she would kill him if she did not leave him so. I saw Erselie press her sweet hands on Horatia's pallid brow—a moment—saw Horatia shrink from that touch, then saw no more, but left them both together.

Lord Lyndfield, with the window open to the back garden, was smoking out into the air; a grave face enough he wore under the weedy influence, and hopeless enough he was; but I could tell he respected what he comprehended not in the mysterious sleep.

"All humbug in *this* case, of course?" taking a morsel of unfinished Manilla from his lips.

"If sleep be humbug, yes."

"You don't mean he *is* asleep?"

"He is though, and alone."

"Then I say no more. I had washed my hands, and I now deliver up my responsibility. He *was* not a stone's throw from the undertaker's."

"I thought so" (I had indeed). "Will he positively recover, Lord Lyndfield?"

"Nothing will positively be except to-morrow. But there is good chance if his wife do not pet him, nor he coddle himself too

much, nor starve himself—equally absurd things to do.”

“Arnold Major ‘*coddle!*’”

“Certainly. I tell you what, I do not understand you *new young men*, any better than the Puseyites, or spirit-rappers, or table-turners; nor do I fancy you will, any of you, make healthy parents for the next generation.”

“I am exonerated, for I shall never be a parent at all.”

He shook his head. “It is very fine, but, I repeat, neither natural nor healthy. What sort of feelings can a man have given way to and persisted in, to fall positively ill *from* them and nothing else—a man with an affectionate wife and fair prospects, as prospects go? And as for you, young one, I understand *you* still less. You are not ill—delicate enough, but keep going—yes, are well. Yet you will neither make your fortune nor get married.”

"No."

I knew this rallying was the expression of extreme philanthropy, and a little materialistic doubt.

"You can't live on angels' food, these stirring, striving times," he said again.

"Multitudes of men did once, and wanderers too, in the pure air of the eastern wilderness; and as long as they kept the "sapphire tables" unfractured in their hearts, it suited them, it was sweet to them to feed so. But my manna is not the old-fashioned sort, but the new—not all sweet, quite sufficiently bitter—nor do I walk in the appetising air of Liberty, yet would I die a slave—if it must be."

"Good powers! I shall have to carry you back with me a bit. Yet, your mind is clear—strange images as it reflects. And you and my good child would seem to have a strange connection somewhere. You have both turned against me together, and soared out of my

reach or help, poor things. Beware of dreams, though."

"Dreams don't hurt the good—only the evil."

"What kind of a woman *is* it our friend has married?" he went on, after a few futile puffs. Fancy describing Horatia to Lord Lyndfield! As well have read Bailey's "Mystic" to the late Hugh Miller.

It is good not to know the future even when it is not dark: the steps of progress *to be lived*, if foreseen, would write wrinkles to remain, instead of shadows to vanish, on the bravest brow. Marvellous in its psychological simplicity is Harriet Martineau's depiction of the child who cried because she should have to wash and dress and have her hair done every day, her life all through! Above all, how tedious to the tender-hearted is the long, long lapse of convalescence in those they "love the best." Poor Arnold Major! snatched from the grave

and heaven, how tardy and struggling was his return to earth, and how he hungered fully to return ! How he hungered for health, and yearned for the strength that would not be *commanded* ! He did not awake from that first miracle of sleep for hours upon hours, and then looked even more like dying than when he was so.

Here, however, Lord Lyndfield's remedial craft stepped in, and how he glorified himself ! He even forgave the new young men for being unlike the old, as soon as he could be of use, I think. And as for his devices to nourish the patient, they were innumerable.

Poor Horatia ! from the moment she was allowed to be with her husband, she believed he would mend "too fast for time," — how he *tried* to mend, and how touching was his pretended energy when he could hardly draw his breath, nor bear the light upon

his vision—when a whisper shivered through him like a ray of lightning down a lightning-rod. She knew it all, but locked her knowledge from him—and for such a woman, at such a time, to conceal her passive anxiousness, was a more heroic effort than to have bound down her active anguish in extremity.

Erselie went back to Lyndfield the moment *he* was out of danger; I did not see her again—by her decision, not my own—but I readily believed she was a wiser judge than I.

For days I took my seat at Arnold Major's desk, yet never for an hour filled his *place*—I could not, it was not in me, though I did my best and was condescendingly overlooked. It was all very well, this complacent lull in the house of business for six weeks or so, just so long as it had not happened to signify, not being the "height

of the season" for literary exposition, and the books I had to decide on in the meantime happening fortunately to be by known names, and fames (however small) accredited.

As for the accountantship, that throve better with me than him, I had a brain less fragile and refined than he.

Still, such a state of things could not last, I knew—so did they at Brown, Jones, and Co.'s, so, alas, did he. I was horrified to find out (so easily, the moment I was alone with him) how this fact preyed on and wore him.

"I cannot possibly get quite well," he sighed, "because it eats into me that they will not wait—they will choose another in my room, never will they retain *you*, because they will believe you, as an *author*, prejudiced in favour of your class."

"Hold your tongue!" I said. (Well I

recollect the day.) "Something will turn up, it always does in the case of young ravens, authors, and readers! If only you would accept the providence Lord Lyndfield offers, and persists in offering — rare circumstance for him."

It was true Lord Lyndfield had written almost every day since his departure (for this weakness of which I speak was not constitutional, only nervous, and what doctor cares to watch or can medicine *that?*). Every day had sent abrupt, but really serious, notes to me, to the effect that he desired (he said *ordered* in the notes, but I didn't tell my dear friend that!) that he desired his late patient (he *would* call him so) and his wife (incomprehensible and uncomprehended) would come to Lyndfield without any nonsense, stay with him awhile in his vacant *home* side of the chase, and get all their nonsense taken clean out of them by the

extraordinary influence of the "fattest air in Britain."

Of course, the grand allurements and prospect of recovery rested in the cream and camomiles of that northern Canaan. But in this instance I really did think *both* those agents of "health, the natural religion," would serve imperceptibly to restore the wasted energy and enrich the attenuated blood.

Then, I knew at the bottom that the intense vigilance of the *husband*—not the patient—(awakening in revenge for its sick suspension tenfold strong) wore him more than all the other causes and *kept* him low. I had not seen Horatia since Lord Lyndfield went away; woman-like, I fancy she was glad not to meet me; but now I resolved to face her and win her over to my views for him, which were my only hopes.

She was altered; not in face, nor had she lost one jot of spirit, one trick of fascination,

one particle of *character*. But a new light lay on her eyes, like the reflection of some twilight-dawning star, melancholy, not mournful, trembling in its very calm. Great sorrow had swept her ever tender conscience, and left it cold, not scarred or seared! and had purged her bosom of its haughty self-reliance, made her trust in God and her human master greater, and her trust in men far less. Her very love seemed more human, more womanly it could not be; and as for his love for her, oh, how she clasped it now! how it folded her from head to foot, and veiled her inmost spirit from the vision of any other man!

“Certainly,”—in reply to my long address (I always use too many words I am afraid)—“certainly, we shall go to Lyndfield, as those who know it recommend it; I mean decidedly to beg him, as soon as ever I am *straight*; I know not how soon that may be, but soon, I think. It is of no use for even me to ask him

to go alone, and *then*," with a sweet expression, "I can pretend it is on my account, you see."

I "saw," I understood her. Right or wrong of me to do so, I wrote a letter to Lord Lyndfield, explaining her wifely scruples. Came there then a missive truly in keeping with him.

"She was a foolish woman, or a selfish one; she meddled with her husband's mending, and her child's well-doing after that. It was infinitely better for a baby to be born in the country than in town; the first breath its lungs drew was surely more adapted to fill them if it was air than if it was smoke."

I never expected Horatia would *bear* such an arrangement, but she *did*; all honour to her! And she carried it through with downright courage, physical and moral; she disdained her own natural frailty in the time of her husband's unnatural weakness—honour to her again! It was really very good of her to go; because

Lord Lyndfield and she had not taken to each other, as the phrase is ; they were not persons, either, ever to do so ! Besides, she knew very well Erselie lived at Lyndfield, or close “there-by,” and she could not forget, though she had forgiven, the hour of her own discomfiture and powerlessness, and the other woman’s power and glory.

So, a third time, honour to her ! Horatia *went*, and once more, to laud her justly, it was far more meritorious in her to go to Lyndfield, disliking it, than it would have been to accept the shelter (not proffered at the right time, I *must* say) of any one of the other fair country mansions she had adorned so often, and to which she had so often been bidden, in former days of *fairer* fortune, as men call it.

Indeed, I was glad and thankful when they were gone ; yet I felt, how dispirited that day, or rather evening, for I returned from the city to find them vanished. I

was to "take care" of the house, and the children had come home with me there. I could not pardon myself for the *heavy* weariness that descended on me, and wrapped my faculties, no mist, but thick as London fog. Then the children—they were growing daily a heavier harass, for it was daily more difficult to do one's duty by them, and this difficulty, under present circumstances, would not diminish with time. I had kept them both with me, and out of their uncle's house, until that very day, at some cost (trifling enough to any man with a settled income, but much to me just then), as I was obliged to hire an extra room, and an attendant for Philippa, which attendant, chosen in desperate need and the thick of all-absorbing anxieties, innoculated the child with all kinds of tricks through her unfailing imitateness.

This night they came home. I speculated

much and long on their destinies, and the destinies of children born as they, to whom it seems as though Heaven, in its inexorable justice, is forced to deny the tempered wind it breathes on the shorn lamb.

They didn't look much like shorn lambs, either the haughty boy or the hardy girl, and it was to me a mystery of the future how they would receive the tender stranger they had no dream of; I dreaded their cool or rough reception of it for its mother's sake.

Anniversaries are not agreeable, I think, and not the dislike of growing older, but the dread of going farther from any very dear point in the past, makes one, if one is not very sanguine, prefer all the unnoticeable days to *them*. It felt incredible to me, for my part, to have gone so far from a certain epoch in my own life, which was a distressful blank, if not a positive grief.

But on it came in its recurrence, sure and slow—slow even to me, for I wished it over: the third return of the date I had learned my poverty, and taken on myself the doom of insignificance. I do not quite know why I wished it over, for I expected no result from it, nor change. It seemed incredible that incorruptibility could persist in keeping itself intact: and for even some months now I had not heard from John, nor of him,—he had ever taken care to keep himself informed I was alive, as I have said before. And so I was mean enough to expect he meant to shirk his responsibility in the matter of the iron box after all. Scarcely need I say that, if he had done so, I should never have appeared against him, troubled him, or inquired after him.

Ten days after the wife and husband had left town, this anniversary would occur. On

its eve the children had been very troublesome indeed,—Hilary especially, who needed a stronger hand than mine, and a more experienced head. How utterly self-disgusted I was! I recollect wishing myself a street-sweeper, like John in the olden times, and thinking how pleasant it would be for a little while to have one's business and duty far below one's intellectual level instead of so much above one's moral one. I dreamed of John that night—all night—which was, perhaps, not strange; and yet, it is true, that I no more expected to see him or hear of him next day than to wake up in Australia. And if *ever* his indiosyncrasy dreamed in its life, I dare say John dreamed about me that night too. In the morning I was obliged to leave the children wholly to their own devices, even before I left the house,—nay, I could not go down to breakfast, for I had a double "leader" to carry out with me all ready,

in consequence of some home-mess in Parliament making a devil's brew *réchauffé* out there two months afterwards. And I left the house thinking of nothing else but it—far less a dreamer than in the night.

I think it must have been about one o'clock, when one of the minor book-keepers (with a large ink-smear splashed on his forehead from surprise), opened my desk-door and looked in. He had not even knocked, and all the men at Brown, Jones & Co.'s were as respectful as their masters were respectable.

"The carriage, please sir."

"What carriage?" I exclaimed.

"The two gentlemen said they were sure you would know their errand. And they have been first to Islington—that is why they are so late."

"Just ask one of them to be so good as to come and speak to me."

Generally, of course, I should have gone out myself to speak to any "gentlemen"—something withheld me now.

One gentleman entered half a minute afterwards, bowing and salaaming, spick and span polite. Still I could not understand it the least; though I had, I felt sure, seen the man's face at sometime or other, I had "clean forgotten where," as Mrs. Arnold Major might have said.

"Excuse me," I observed, trying to be decently polite on my side (though without the least inclination), "I have not the remotest idea of your business; will you oblige me by explaining it instantly, as *mine*, though slight, is urgent."

He gave me a card out of a "city purse," in which was a place to carry such credentials. "Mr. Osborne," he said, as if reading it, while handing, "I was present," he went on, awfully

slowly, "at the reading of the Loftus will, three years since, on this very day, together with my friend, who is at present with me—outside, of course. We had not been legally employed by the testator, but were consulted by yourself after the demise—you were very young at the time."

"And I'm not so very much older now. What would you have me do, Mr. Osborne? I should be sorry to have to leave this just now, it being a friend's post."

"Yet your presence is positively, immediately, and legally necessary."

"Stop here, then, one moment, please."

I blessed all the stars of the fortunate that the handsome *head* was wanting in the establishment that day, as to his bodily presence, having gone to Aldershott, (quite a new time-killer then), so I could speak to my favourite, the partner who always looked exhausted beneath the pressure, not only

of business, but of *feelings*; a curious man who might have been a poet, if he had been born minus the bump of acquisitiveness and the hump (?) of self-esteem! He let me go immediately, and pretended it was convenient, though I knew it was not.

John had sent the largest glass-coach, the only one left then, I believe, in the livery-stables of the largest Uglyvillian inn. It had two large horses, as fat as prize swine, that moved like sloths in harness. Solemnly, albeit—we were all three solemn, and if only we had had on hatbands, &c., it might have been actually the funeral over again. I thought we should never get there, and I suppose solicitors would no more think of making themselves companionable while in the throes of a professional catastrophe, than judges would shave themselves in their wigs.

It was a good two hours before we got

to the Roman Villa—and then, in the first instance, there was no John, he having left the street-door wide open, and run away—or rather, gone into the library, where he waited for us.

He would not shake hands with me—would not even speak—would not even so much as turn towards me a single lash of one of his eyes; but handed a little round-warded key (standing in front of both the lawyers, and exactly between them), as though he were anxious to divide the key between the two. One of them took it, the other inclined his head solemnly, and off we all moved in procession upstairs, he heading us, and John *last*. Through the corridor none had trodden for three years, and past the doors of sleeping-chambers where none had slept so long. Past my own bedroom door, which I shrank from and hankered after at the same moment (if any one can understand me).

Into my uncle's bed-room—its corner—that iron corner. Next moment the key turned in its lock, soft as velvet—it was open, the iron door, just large enough to permit its contents to pass through into the air. Then John produced the other and smaller key. But the legal gentlemen shook their heads, and both laying hold of the little box, they bore it downstairs again between them, like a miniature sarcophagus, placed it on the library-table, from which all else had been swept away; then plied the second tiny patent sesame, softer, more velvet-fitting than the first.

Of course the legal gentlemen were about to address me in a proper professional exordium, in the act of opening (but still *before* opening) the box. But John aroused, vivacious as a canary-bird at five o'clock in the morning.

“Hold your tongue, sir! What *do* you mean by keeping Mr. Ernest waiting?” he cried so loud and shrill that he frightened away

their intention. In another instant the key was turned, the box opened; within it lay a small parchment roll, whose very red tape-twist was sealed with exquisite elaboration — my uncle's coat-of-arms in full (of which, as John informed me afterwards, the signet and the die had both been destroyed after this their final affixture).

I really thought, now realisation was at hand, that it was all an invention of dream together; it even struck me that John might have contrived the trick himself. *They* did not think so, the two examinants, for they fastened on it like a couple of leeches, having opened it between them furtively. Very disinterested, as it could not possibly concern *them*.

For ten minutes or so there was silence. Then :—

“A curious document,” observed one.

“The most singular, to be regular, I ever perused,” the other.

"It *is* regular," John asserted, rather than questioned.

"Most certainly."

Then they whispered another minute or two, and unfixed from the open parchment a double sheet of large writing-paper; it had been simply wafered to the parchment edge, and rolled up with it.

"This is private, I believe," said they (or one of them, I forget which) and handed it to me. It had on its upper side these words in my uncle's hand. "For my nephew and heir-at-law, Ernesto Loftus." The first light autumn brown that creeps with time on ink had even so soon touched it. "Private" was marked in the corner, I forgot to say. And like leaves of latest autumn, the sheets, in turning them, shook and rustled in my hand. On the inner page was written (it was like reading an epistle from the other world):—

"I loved you well, my child, but certainly

not wisely. I treated and restrained you in my tenderness as though you had been a woman who was never to meet or do battle with the world. I saw my error too late to mend it in my mortal life, but by that time I had discovered *that* existence would last a very little while to me. I had not strength of mind to banish you while yet I lived. When dead, you will first regret, then detest me, and after that become indifferent as to whether I had lived or died. Not finally, for in the hour you read this, you will first learn to know me. If the years I shall then have given you for probation (few enough—had I been more courageous and less fond, they would have been twice as many) are tests of what I think you are integrally, you will thank me for them, and I also, I know not how, rejoice! But if you be not what I think you, by that time it will be known

to your own soul—and mine; and *then* the blessing I have left you will change to bitterness—no need for me to curse you.”

A sort of wild rapture, irrespective of *all* but the fact that, little as I had been tried indeed, I was at least no hypocrite, rushed through my brain. I felt as though (without wings) I could fly—giddy with the amaze that had no taint of anguish. I wanted nothing else that hour, felt no human presence in the room (only a spirit still *human*, that was and must be absent.) I don't know how long the suspension from the *outward* lasted, and I am sure I did not swoon; but the first pulse of resuscitated consciousness awoke to the sense of comedy in me, which, I fear, will never die. There was an awful smell, not as of a “tortoise boiled in brass,” but of sheepskin roasting. The men were scolding John too, but he was outrageous, and didn't care; his voice

rose to a positive scream as it roused me.

"Sure I may burn my own will!" was the first remark I heard. "You said the other one was *regular*."

"It is not regular to burn it till it has been duly compared with the former under the eyes of the real legatee."

"Never mind!" again screamed John.

But one of them pushed him off the rug and held his arms back, while the other picked the thing out of the fire with the tongs—a huge fire, quite filling the library grate, but fortunately very clear; so that, smutty and scorched as was the document, it was, to all legal intents and purposes, still "intact," for it was presently "laid on the table," like a map, side by side with—*what?* My uncle's *real* will, made, drawn up, and dated, the very day after the false one—his own too! Copied by the same solicitor, and

signed by the same "parties;" to wit, John and the lawyer (as in the first instance), the lawyer as knowing as the other was ignorant of what he did. The will was precisely the same as in the former case, saving and only these trifling alterations—that my name was in the place of John's this time; and a hundred a-year for life to him, with five hundred pounds down to the legal gentleman *employé*, or to the latter's next heir in case of his own decease, were clearly and unmistakably assigned. Quite as clearly and unmistakably came lastly a codicil, a charge to me myself, or so it seemed,—a great and solemn obligation, though it was, in fact, but the suggestion of a heart remembering its own weakness in the flesh, and together with that remembrance, realizing that universal charge of the Maker of all, to "love."

My uncle (perhaps touched deeply with the truth that he could not carry his images and

idols of beauty even where beauty is eternal), expressed in the plainest words his great desire—for it was no command nor condition—that the whole Collection should be forthwith sold for some especial purpose of (what men call) *charity*—the sum it should realise to be applied as I might think fit within such limits, if I complied with such desire. It being stipulated that the “charity” should be one wholly distinct from any so-called existing ones, except a hospital. Also stating (there are no hints in law, but in undress language I should have called it a hint) that he should prefer me altogether to use my own discretion in the matter.

What *discretion* had I, Ernesto Loftus? I know not whether any. Dear Arnold Major told me I was a “child” in some things; and I believe I must be, for my whole being sank down in a trance of wonder and terror at the responsibility placed

in my hands. I could not shirk it. I knew that. How I wished the *letter* had been all that was left to me! For the first rush of joyful recollection that now I could really and substantially serve my best and dearest friend sank low—sank leaden-deep—like a waterspout in its explosion. For him I dared do nothing—for his wife less than nothing! if such a phrase be permissible. To send one lightest right of his away from him would be sacrilege if not sin.

Never shall I forget that night. Musing is wholesome, perhaps, but, when unfruitful, it is melancholy. I thought *on* and thought *out*—my feelings swept humanity. Here was a great boon granted me—to *me*, to whom all wealth was *personally* useless. And, oh, how immense a duty: if pleasure be a duty—for oh, how delicious it is to *give*! The one temptation besetting those of generous hearts and large means is to give in the

right way. I knew this way not, how should I? I must wait, as all those wait who love.

At Uglyville again. I stayed there a few hours, but could not leave the children longer, and was thankful to have an excuse in them for leaving my old home. Perhaps this gratitude was morbid; but I am sure it wasn't wrong. However, I did not leave my dear good old crony of a John for a little bit. What a mercy that nothing can alter temperament, the heaven-bestowed, I think—for its veil, or mask, or atmosphere shelters a good many souls.

John's gratification was not the least noisy. On the contrary, he assumed to have guessed the truth all along, for this is what happened between us: when the lawyers had departed, finding me impervious to compliment or cajolement, I went to look for him. He was sitting before the kitchen

fire, smoking *very* slowly, and looking, as I can fancy those prematurely emparadised beings are said to look who chew (or swallow) the oriental hemp.

“Why, John, do you enjoy it so much!”

“Don’t I, Mr. Ernest! it’s my first.”

“First what, John?”

“First pipe, sir, since—”

Here he commenced to smoke again—or rather went on.

“Is it possible? You’re half a hero, John! But now I want to speak to you; you needn’t leave off smoking while I do, and you can take your time to answer. What do you intend to do now?”

He didn’t take his time; he took the pipe from his lips and held it out before him.

“I mean to take to meat again, Mr. Ernest.”

“Meat! You don’t mean it was anything but a joke about the bread and cheese?”

"Three years, Mr. Ernest, have passed, since butcher's meat or poultry has passed my lips."

"But why, my dear, good man?"

"That, having made my will, you might the sooner enjoy it, Mr. Ernest."

"But the tobacco, John? that would not make you live any longer, would it?"

"It makes me sleepy, sir, and sleep makes fat, they say."

"But now, John, you will come and live with me, won't you?"

"If you please, Mr. Ernest,—providedly you take charge of the money—*my* money,—or else I shall go and spend it all at once."

"What on, John?"


"There seems many ways, sir, but I rather think the best would be on little children without parents, Mr. Ernest."

Curious words! How they dropped in

my heart. I believe in modern oracles, and *half*-believe that the simple, not the *foolish*, are at times oracular. Children "*without*"—not children who have "*lost*"—their parents. What might this not mean?

* * * * *

Lord Lynfield had declared that none of the "new young men" would make "healthy fathers for the next generation." But some of them have healthy children, and that is as good. The babe of Horatia and Arnold Major was a prodigy of size, symmetry, sweetness, and serenity—alliterative qualities belonging to it, and I can use no other terms. I know nothing so terrible, so unnatural, so bewildering as a funny, unshapely, cross, or restless infant; albeit *pitiful* enough. I fancy the old fable of changelings came from the awful fact of hereditary weakness or imperfection developed by *unlawful* marriage—for such a thing there is.




However, this child is still the most exquisite creature “going,” and full of promise as a rose-bud of veiled bloom. Being born at Lyndfield, the very dawn of the day I recovered my rights, the master of Lyndfield Chase held it to be quite as much indebted to that surpassing climate as though it had been “thought of” there as well. As for Horatia, she made up for her indifference (?) to it ante-natally, by her motherhood’s perfection afterwards. She never went out in the evening—nay, never at all save when the weather was fit for it also; she never danced nor sang save into its tender ears, till this same babe was weaned. She fulfilled the greatest duty of a woman’s life triumphantly, for she preserved her own health in exactest balance for its sake,—not so *very* selfish a proceeding, or it would not be so exception-

ally rare, I think;—she preserved her own health, I repeat, by strict adherence to the old laws of nature, so fast becoming obsolete, but which are eternal as the stars, as the hills, and—love.

So her reward was—the natural result—an offspring healthy in body and in brain, the darling of nature and the *grateful* child of Heaven; for is anything *so* grateful as the pure enjoyment of Heaven's best gift, Existence?

Still, I said she fulfilled her highest *duty* perfectly, but I did not name it her greatest pleasure. Still, as before its birth, the child is as *nothing* to her, in comparison with him, its *father*. I think that ever-growing, passionate, persistent, and glorious love of hers for her husband will teach her son a lesson few sons have been taught before, namely, that in perfect conjugal love and union such bliss is to be found,



such "full repose;" that to put up even temporarily with its *counterfeits* would be something even more absurd—not to speak morally—than to exchange the very kingdom of Heaven for a mess of pottage.

And as for my friend—my darling brother, I may call him now, for his own boy calls me "uncle," and is even named after me—as for Arnold Major, I fear the only charge that can be brought against him is a certain quality ineffably lovely to those who love it, but which worldly persons call "*futility*." In revenge for his strained and set position in practical life, never let go by him (I have elsewhere spoken of his tenacity) he *does* become more romantic, in regard to Horatia, every day. He is, as a parent and a "new" man, at once proud and jealous of his child. I believe he considers himself a hero not to repine at the number of kisses which Horatia bestows on the baby; for truly it is still a baby, and will not be *forced*

out of babyhood ever, so may look forward to several baby years as yet.

It was as hard as the lovingest being in this world can imagine, not to pour out every golden drop of all that sudden gold-flush that had fallen on me on those, so few! I loved. But I loved them, and they each other, far too well. If Arnold Major had not recovered from his distressing illness, it would have been different. I should not have had to *force* anything on him, for he would have *taken* all he wanted—I know that—and so would she. But he *did* recover; the perfect and entire relief from toil, and the necessary suspension of all responsibility, were the means, so said the doctor; but I greatly fear that being completely alone with his wife, where *no one could get at her*, was the crown of the result. Delicate he ever will and must be. Sometimes I have a dream I shall doctor him some day, and more effectually than any one else has or ever could.

To explain this last vain speech. If I have a dream of doctoring one man, it extends to *man-kind*. I am studying hard, they say, but I find it easy work, because every bit of me responds to it. An idle man with a large fortune needs positively some superhuman pride, some seraphic Mentor, to prompt his every step and *handful* of *largesse*, and such guides are fabulous these days. I don't know whether my uncle's idea of selling the "collection" for a hospital prompted *me*, but it *may* have done so, to endeavour to become a physician; but I do know how all my faculties and longings stretch towards such an end. Meantime, there is plenty for all of us, if we want it, but I only restrict myself to necessary expenses, though I "learn of all who know," and there is not a master of medicine in Europe, or the East, with whom I do not communicate. Having bequeathed my possessions, I care not what be-tides, only I should like to live long enough

to *be* the first "Medicine-man" in all the world.

Arnold Major did not *keep* that blessed accountancy, for I went to Brown, Jones, & Co., and refused it for him. Instantly they were treated with, they skulked (I *can* only use such an expression), and the next thing they did was to offer him two hundred a-year more for his readership, which this time he accepted, knowing he deserved it, and knowing also that he could not help the other officials being paid after the old *regime*, because I had placed a certain sum for their benefit in the firm. Anyhow, he and his wife want no more now than they own and possess, for the two children are my charge wholly, belonging to me altogether, and the highest proof of regard so conscientious a man could confer was bestowed on me in the hour he *gave* them to me. Quite free of them, of course, the husband and wife are *free of home* at last, as they never were, or could be, while such children were in their home.

All Arnold Major's savings are *safe* for his *own*, nor are they small. Also, if his wife should be the mother of "ten" (happy ten, if so), the future lacks not promise, for, to judge from the Bank of England note for a thousand pounds, which Sir Verveyne Waters sent baby Ernest with his blessing, I think the soldier's "*savings*" are not so small as he made out to me. Then Valliance Major's idiot child is dead, the only blessing that could befall it; he has no other children, and perhaps Horatia's husband will have Castle Valliance after all; if they have not money enough to "keep it up," as the saying is, they can at least, in that case, have plenty of beautifully built rooms for the "ten," should they dawn and bloom after the fashion of the *first*.

Hilary and Philippa are getting on, each *better* than could have been expected. Philippa's woful and lengthened sense of bereavement, when taken from Horatia, was good to see, and made her better, too, I do believe.

Hilary still talks of the "diggings," and I don't discourage him, for I have learned one or two little things. For instance, my great desire, when first he became my charge, was to send him to Harrow. *There he could not be entered*, because not a legitimate child. That fact staggered me a little, but the shock brought wisdom to me, I believe, and hope.

"The poor ye have always with you." Yes, and not only the poor. I am no purist of the school which denies all classes (virtually) except its own, nor do I affect the philosophy which is blind to such sorrows as are the fruits of selfishness or vice. I fear we shall ever, till this "sick earth grows young again," have the innocent children of the guilty among us, *quite* as thickly as the poor. Days and nights I brooded over this subject, but my first impulse was the best, I think, and in its fulfilment it has not played me false. In the old house,

where I was never positively happy, if only negatively uncomfortable, I have made a home for such. There is nothing in it like a *school*, which my very soul abhors. But inasmuch as no man that ever lived could accomplish the least purpose of humanity *quite* perfectly without the aid of woman, so I am indebted for the arrangement and management of this home to the two best women in the world.

I don't half like calling it a *Home*, because that precious word has passed into slang some time ago; and we are deluged with homes, sacred and secular, Puseyitical and Jesuitical, the length and breadth of the land. But there is no other name for it, and (unlike those its contemporaries) it is actually and indeed a home. A home of *almost* infancy as yet, so short a time has it been founded; and I fervently believe that the children *in it* will grow up to call it so.

Many persons from various places thought

me very mean because I would not suffer a single article of the "Collection" to be bought (or bidden for) *under* its exact and utmost value. They didn't only think me mean, but called me so. I did not, and do not care. All the good the richest man among us all can do, in this short life, is such a drop in the ocean, that it reminds one of the journey of a single ray of light through space,—or of the eternal truth—that Love is patience.

THE END.

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